# Militancy, initiative and support the conduct of the 1972 miners' strike

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# Militancy, Initiative and Support:

# The Conduct of the 1972 Miners' Strike

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the 1972 miners' strike as a class conflict. The strike's immediate causes were job losses and stagnating wages leading to a high wage claim that sought to redress the decline but challenged the Government's inflation control mechanism. It considers the overtime ban that prepared the miners for the subsequent strike, and shows that the picketing of stocks, which determined the strike's outcome, was largely peaceful, and demonstrates that any hostile picketing was directed against the perceived strike-breaking role of officials and clerks who crossed the picket lines.

The thesis assesses the growing disconnect between the miners and their leadership, whose collaborative policies implicated them in pit closures and wage restraint. It shows that the leadership's instructions on picketing were often defied by the pickets, with decisions determined at local rather than national level. It demonstrates that instructions to continue safety cover and allow pit maintenance were openly dismissed and defied by the pickets, who saw, within the issue, the entire future of the industry. It also addresses the support won by the pickets from other trade unionists, which built upon links established between workers during the overtime ban and the strike, rather than between union leaders.

The thesis shows that the Government, which had desired a confrontation with the public sector, was unprepared for the pickets' swift success in curtailing movement of coal stocks, and that its defeat was largely due to its own complacency and belief that it had the upper hand. It demonstrates that the Cabinet was hugely frustrated at its inability to find a remedy to curb the mobile and mass picketing, which were largely legal, and led it to seek changes to the operation of the police and to the law to curb future picketing that it increasingly saw as subversive.

## Contents

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**Charts and Tables**

**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| ACP | Accelerated Closure Programme |
| ACPO | Association of Chief Police Officers |
| AEU | Amalgamated Engineering Union |
| AIS | Area Incentive Scheme |
| ASLEF | Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Enginemen and Firemen |
| AUEW | Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers |
| BACM | British Association of Colliery Management |
| BSC | British Steel Corporation |
| CAWU | Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union |
| CBI | Confederation of British Industries |
| CC | Chief Constable |
| CEGB | Central Electricity Generating Board |
| CMFGB | Coal Merchants Federation of Great Britain |
| COSA | Colliery Officials' Staff Association |
| CP | Communist Party |
| DE | Department of Employment |
| DES | Department of Education and Schools |

| | |
|---|---|
| DHSS | Department of Health and Social Security |
| DSS | Department of Social Security |
| DTI | Department of Trade and Industry |
| ETU | Electrical Trades Union, component part of EETPU from 1968 |
| EETPU | Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union |
| FTO | Full Time Official |
| I.R.Act | Industrial Relations Act |
| JNNC | Joint National Negotiating Committee |
| LCDTU | Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions |
| LSE | London School of Economics |
| MOD | Ministry of Defence |
| NACODS | National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers |
| NCB | National Coal Board |
| NEC | National Executive Committee |
| NPLA | National Power Loading Agreement |
| NRT | National Reference Tribunal |
| NUGMW | National Union of General and Municipal Workers |
| NUM | National Union of Mineworkers |
| NUR | National Union of Railwaymen |
| NUSn | National Union of Seamen |
| NUSs | National Union of Students |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PAYE | Pay-As-You-Earn |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| SEGB | Scottish Electricity Generating Board |
| SLL | Socialist Labour League |
| SSEB | South of Scotland Electricity Board |
| TGWU | Transport and General Workers Union |
| TUC | Trades Union Congress |
| UDM | Union of Democratic Mineworkers |
| WPIS | Weekly Paid Industrial Staff |
| WRCC | West Riding County Council |

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of the Thesis

The 1972 strike has suffered in the historiography of the mining industry as the poor relation of two more prominent national miners' strikes in the post-war era, primarily the 1984-1985 strike, which consumes a huge proportion of the column inches of writings about miners, and indeed on strikes in general. This is largely because it was a victory for the government and the last hurrah of organised working class resistance, but also because it was an attritional conflict that dragged out over a year, compared to the relatively brief 1972 strike. The second most high-profile was the 1974 miners' strike, which merges in the memories of many with the 1972 strike, but is most remembered as the strike that brought down the Heath Government. The 1972 strike is arguably the most significant of the three, and paved the way for the other two. Having been beaten twice in quick succession the Conservatives were determined not to be beaten again and so ensured that the cards were more heavily stacked in their favour during the 1984-1985 strike. The significance of the 1972 miners' strike lies in it being the first official national stoppage by coalminers since the 1926 lockout that precipitated the General Strike. It was, more pertinently, the first official national strike under nationalisation and the opening conflict of a turbulent year that had major political ramifications for the Heath Government. This thesis addresses the conduct of the 1972 miners' strike, which began at midnight on 8 January and ended when miners returned to work, victorious, on 28 February. It was called in pursuit of an above inflation wage claim that sought to redress a stagnation in

miners' wages in relation to comparable industrial workers. This seven-week strike was preceded by a ban on overtime, which began on 1 November 1971 and made significant inroads into coal stocks whilst preparing miners for the subsequent strike. Prior to the strike, few commentators expected the miners to win or even to hold out for so long, in part because barely three fifths of mineworkers had voted for strike action.

The conduct of the strike saw a largely disciplined approach to picketing aimed at curtailing the movement of fuel to and from the power stations. This involved well over five hundred establishments, many of these on a twenty-four-hour basis, by some forty thousand miners daily and over two hundred thousand miners in total.[1] The strategy of the miners during the strike, in curtailing movement of coal and focusing on the power stations, proved very effective and stranded much of the coal stocks upon which the National Coal Board (NCB / Board) and the Government had relied at the outset. In this there was a broad recognition that the miners were in conflict not directly with the Board but rather with the Government itself, which was directing the Board behind the scenes. The miners were also, to a large extent, in conflict with the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM / Union).

Thus, the strike can be seen to have had four 'actors', which officially divided between the NCB and the Government on one side, and the NUM and the miners on the other. However, the Board and the Government did not entirely see eye-to-eye, and the hands of the Board were tied in the wage negotiations by Government directives and its inflation control mechanism. The Government were also frustrated that the Board appeared willing to offer more than the arbitrary limit it had set. The Board were more aware than the Government about the growing mood of discontent amongst the miners and had warned it that to offer an amount that was restricted to the upper limit set by its mechanism would be sure to precipitate a strike. On the other side, the miners were increasingly frustrated at the collaborative approach of the NUM leadership during the preceding decade, which manifested in unofficial strikes in the two years prior to the 1972 strike and in the widespread disregard for the leadership's directives during the strike. In addition, the NCB and the NUM were to a large extent

[1] HC Deb, 2 March 1972, vol.832 c.727; *Labour Research*, April 1972, pp.74-5

partners in the industry and agreed wholeheartedly on the need to undertake safety and maintenance work during the strike to protect the pits and so the future of the industry, though this was widely ignored by the miners.

## 1.2 Thesis Plan

Chapter One is an introduction to the thesis and considers its aims. It gives a summary of the strike and reviews the causes and political background to the dispute. It provides an overview of the literature relevant to this thesis and considers the nature of the sources utilised. Chapter Two considers the industrial background to the strike. It reviews the nationalisation process and its financial implications, and the subsequent rationalisation and contraction of the industry as the demand for coal declined. It considers the modernisation of the industry and the introduction of national wage bargaining, which had the unforeseen effect of unifying the miners and their grievances. It addresses the NUM's role in facilitating pit closures and also the miners' growing discontent, which turned to militancy as they began to challenge the leadership's passive and collaborative approach, and manifested in 'unofficial' national strikes in 1969 and 1970.

Chapter Three reviews the prelude to the strike from the 1971 NUM conference until the end of the overtime ban preceding the strike. It considers the wage proposals put forward at the conference that attempted to redress the historic decline in miners' relative wage levels, and decreased the threshold necessary for official strike action. It assesses the ban on overtime preceding the strike that decreased coal stocks and demonstrated to miners how low their wages really were, in preparation for the vote on strike action. It considers the formation of liaison committees, which became strike committees and introduced an organisational element into the dispute. Chapter Four considers the wage negotiations and the historic decline in miners' wages, and compares their wage claim to those of other public sector and manual workers. It assesses the Government's desire to confront the public sector, its introduction of the N-1 Pay Norm that took no account of the merits of the miners' case, and its role in dictating the terms and the time-frame of the negotiations. It considers the issue of arbitration, the Wilberforce Inquiry, and the role played by the leaders of the

NUM and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in negotiating behind the backs of the miners to contain the wage rise.

Chapter Five considers the picketing against the movement of coal stocks and the extent to which the TUC statement at the beginning of the strike enabled the movement of coal to be so effectively minimised. It assesses the nature of the picketing and shows how this developed across the seven weeks of the strike. It reviews the divergence between the NUM's national guidelines and their local interpretation, which often ran contrary to the wishes of the leadership. Chapter Six considers the picketing against clerical workers and officials that went against the directives of the NUM leadership, who had agreed to continue to provide safety cover at the pits during the strike. It considers the nature and extent of such picketing, the variety of tactics employed across the coalfields and their development over the course of the strike as the picketing became increasingly large scale and hostile. It demonstrates widespread disregard by the pickets for the directives of the leadership, both at national and Area level. It discusses the reasons for the miners' decisions to curtail safety work, which exposes a deep anger and frustration felt by miners towards the betrayals of the leadership and towards those breaking the strike and reflected differing and divergent views on the future of the industry.

Chapter Seven considers the distribution of coal stocks during the strike, and the supply of fuel to priority consumers. It shows that the power stations were thought to have sufficient stocks to outlast the strike, but that the pickets' success in halting stock movement led to a downward revision of the timescale and ultimately to power cuts as many power stations ran short. It considers the supply of coal to vulnerable consumers, which was a key battleground in the manipulation of public opinion on both sides of the dispute, and assesses the differing outlooks in defining 'priority'. Chapter Eight considers the support that the miners received during the strike, particularly from the transport unions, which was crucial to their success, and reviews the TUC's statement at the outset, which was seen in some quarters as the cause of the effective mass trade union support for the strike. It considers the widespread support received from students, who were in their own dispute with the Government, and demonstrates that miners received significant support from the public, with public opinion remaining on the side of the miners throughout the strike.

Chapter Nine considers the mass picket which closed the Saltley coke depot with support from thousands of Birmingham engineering workers. It shows that the confrontation inflicted a severe blow to the Heath Government and marked the effective end of the strike, though it actually had little bearing on its outcome. It assesses the build up to the mass picket, the nature of the engineers' support, the confrontation itself and the subsequent response. Chapter Ten considers the legal aspects of the strike, the nature of the policing, and the application of the Law. It considers the policing of industrial disputes, and the relationship between pickets and police. It addresses the allegation that the strike was 'a victory for violence', and the developing use of the term 'intimidation' during the strike. It reviews the legislative measures considered by both Labour and the Conservative governments to counter unofficial strikes, by strengthening the hand of the official trade union leadership, and considers the Industrial Relations Act. It demonstrates the Cabinet's frustration at the effectiveness of the picketing and its attempts to seek grounds for prosecution and ultimately changes to the Law.

### 1.3 Causes of the Strike

The question arises: Why was there an official national miners' strike in 1972, having not been one for over four decades? The answer lies both in the reasons why there was a strike in 1972, but also in the reasons why there had not been one in the preceding years. I will consider the second half of this equation first. In the twenty years or so after the nationalisation of the coal industry there was a strong feeling amongst miners that the nationalised industry was something to be proud of and thankful for. Many miners remembered the conditions under the previous private ownership, and felt that the industry now belonged to them as it belonged to the nation. NUM officials worked closely with the NCB from a political conviction that nationalisation should be made to succeed, and ideally through a Labour government. Coal was initially in high demand, and though conditions were still difficult and dangerous, miners supported the Board. The Union, as the pit-level defender of miners' rights, was wholeheartedly supported by the vast majority of miners, and union identity was very strong. Given these conditions, where the NUM and the NCB (and indeed the workforce) worked closely together for the benefit of the industry, it was relatively easy for the NUM

leadership to exploit its relationship with its members and convince the workforce to refrain from taking industrial action as the demand for coal began to decline and the industry to contract. Under the early contraction, the Board was able to move miners to other pits, but these were increasingly further away from the miners' home pit. The Union were able to convince miners that the contraction was necessary, and that protest was futile and would lead to further closures. This was aided by the disparate nature of collieries, particularly those under threat of closure, which were largely spread around the periphery of the coalfield, such that a pit closure was a local affair. The NUM leadership, allied as it is to the Labour Party, also sought to convince miners that things would get better when a Labour Government was returned and that they should therefore do nothing to undermine the prospects of getting Labour back in power, and then, when Wilson was elected, of the need to support 'our' Labour Government.[2] The identification of Labour as 'our' government came from both the right and left wings of the NUM – Labour and Communist (Communist Party of Great Britain / CP). Miners were effectively warded off major industrial action by their defence of the nationalised industry, their support for the leadership of the NUM, their belief in a Labour government, and also by a leadership that persuaded them otherwise.

In considering why the 1972 strike occurred, we must first assess the changes to the conditions set out above, the most significant of which was the restructuring of the wage system leading to national wage-bargaining. This saw the introduction of a day-wage system to replace both piece-work and task-work in 1955, and later the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) in the mid-1960s. The NPLA led, initially, to a stagnation of wages for many higher paid miners, as their pay rises were held back to allow the lower paid to catch up, and consequently increased discontent particularly in the higher paid central coalfield Areas. The discontent engendered by the NPLA played out on a national, rather than local, stage and led to increased unity amongst miners, who had previously been divided. In addition, the incoming Wilson Government introduced an Accelerated Closure Programme (ACP) as it moved away from a reliance on coal towards gas, oil and nuclear power, which led to the closure of many productive pits that appeared to have a future, and entailed a focus on the central coalfield at the expense of the periphery.

[2] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.2

The NUM continued to call for restraint and used its influence to head-off protest with an emphasis on working harder to save your pit, under a banner of the 'new realism' of modernisation. The changes associated with pit closures, and with the NPLA, had a profound effect on the outlook and consciousness of miners. The closures often entailed a forced migration of miners, who took with them different practices, attitudes, expressions and forms of industrial action, which served to break down the differences between one region and another, and encouraged a national, rather than a local, outlook. The increasing mechanisation of the industry, which had made the NPLA necessary, led to a growing sense of solidarity and unity across the coalfields, by standardising and rationalising tasks, and also to an increased awareness and consciousness associated with a heightened level of technology and attendant skill level.[3] After the strike, a recognition of the unifying effect of the NPLA led the Board, the Labour Government and the right-wing of the NUM to reintroduce a productivity element to wages in the knowledge that those Areas which benefited from wider seams would earn more, and that this would serve to undermine such unity. This divide-and-rule tactic was introduced in 1977 and was to play a significant part in dividing the miners in the 1984-85 strike leading to the formation of the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), which was focused primarily on the central Nottinghamshire coalfield.[4]

The introduction of the ACP in the mid-1960s caused many miners to lose faith in the Wilson Government, especially as Labour had appeared to promise a better future for the industry in its 1964 election manifesto. This discontent was also felt by other trade unionists and grew when the Government sought to introduce legislation designed to curb the power of the trade unions, though its primary aim was to control the increasingly militant, 'unofficial' element of the workforce. Labour also introduced a statutory incomes and prices policy, with a primary focus on incomes, and a devaluation of the currency, both of which hit public sector wages. Thousands of Labour Party members felt betrayed and cancelled

[3] Rutledge, I, 'Changes in the Mode of Production and the Growth of "Mass Militancy" in the British Mining Industry, 1954-1974', *Science and Society*, Vol.41, No.4, Winter 1977-78, pp.421-4

[4] McIlroy, J., 'Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Politics', in McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. & Campbell, A., (Eds.), *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79*, (Monmouth, 2007) p.229; Richards, A., *Miners on Strike: Class Solidarity and Division in Britain*, (Oxford, 1996) pp.50-3 & p.67; Rutledge, 'Changes in the Mode of Production', pp.424-6

their memberships during the sixties in disappointment at Wilson's policies.[5] Many trade unionists, including miners, began to lose faith with Labour, and also with the leadership of the NUM who were complicit in the ACP and were seen as a prop for the Government. Disillusionment with the leadership combined with discontent over the stagnation of wage rises led to unofficial national miners' strikes in both 1969 and 1970, as miners sought to break the shackles of the NUM's policy of restraint. These strikes emanated from Yorkshire, which had become radicalised under the effects of the NPLA, and were supported by the more militant peripheral Areas, primarily South Wales and Scotland. The Heath Government's subsequent introduction of both the N-1 Norm wage restraint mechanism and the Industrial Relations Act (I.R.Act) arguably transformed these unofficial strikes into the official 1972 strike the following year.

Some historians have argued that the cause of the strike, and indeed the cause of an upturn in strike activity broadly in this period, was the advent of left-wing leaders such as Lawrence Daly and Mick McGahey.[6] This is putting the cart before the horse somewhat, and one feels obliged to consider how these left leaders came to power. They did not emerge out of the ether but were elected by an increasingly angry, militant and left-leaning workforce, and were consequently obliged to represent the views of those who had elected them, but nevertheless obliged to operate within the strictures of the Union. This led invariably to them espousing left phraseology and wage militancy, but containing anything that went beyond this, and heading off any challenge to the government.

### 1.4 Summary of the Strike

The thesis will show that the miners' wage claim, which precipitated the strike, was the product of discontent due to comparatively low wages and job insecurity in the decade before the dispute. The combined effect of the ACP, introduced as part of the Wilson Government's modernisation agenda, and the coincidental

[5] Davies, A.J., *To Build A New Jerusalem: The British Labour Party from Keir Hardie to Tony Blair*, (London, 1996) p.320

[6] Rutledge, 'Changes in the Mode of Production', p.412; Darlington, R. & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain, 1972*, (London, 2001) p.36; Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.1

moves towards national wage bargaining, which held back the wages of the highest paid miners, increased the discontent and had it play out on the national stage. This discontent was brought to a head by increasing frustration with the Government, the Board and the NUM itself, which had played a part in delivering a compliant and passive workforce. The thesis will demonstrate that the miners were subsequently less willing to listen to arguments for compliance with the strategy of the Board or with the actions of the NUM, who had argued that to take industrial action would only increase the contraction of the industry and lead to further job losses. The frustration with government increased with the advent of the Heath premiership, and in particular following the introduction of the I.R.Act and the N-1 Norm designed to hold public sector wage increases below the level of inflation.

At their conference in 1971, the miners subsequently moved towards making an official strike more possible by lowering the threshold for industrial action, whilst putting forward a large, restorative wage claim combined with the threat of industrial action if it were not accepted. The claim was rejected, and a strike was subsequently called, to be preceded by a ban on overtime. The thesis will show that the ban had a number of purposes, but was primarily aimed at diminishing coal stocks, whilst also demonstrating to miners the true value of their wages without the addition of overtime. It was, to all intents and purposes, a part of the dispute and readied the miners for the subsequent strike, such that they were far better prepared than were the Board or the Government when the strike began. This is shown to be largely due to the operation of liaison committees that were established at every colliery, initially to manage the interactions between the various unions and trades during the overtime ban, though they also helped the miners to make contact with local trade unionists for assistance in the subsequent strike, in particular those in transport unions. These liaison committees subsequently became strike committees, which organised picketing rotas, and dealt with issues around the maintenance of the pits during the dispute. The thesis will show that the decisions of the committees on where and when to picket, and the numbers concerned, went beyond the directives of the NUM national leadership. This was particularly true of the picketing against officials undertaking maintenance and safety work in the pits during the strike, and against those clerical workers who continued to work in NCB offices and depots.

The thesis will show that the Government, which desired to win a strike in the public sector in order to assert its authority, was unprepared for the miners' strike despite several previous warnings that its policies would provoke one. It believed it had the upper hand long after it was clear that it did not, and sought to control the negotiations, despite professing a desire to remain detached. All sides are shown to be aware of the importance of public opinion, but the Government was particularly so and both made and delayed decisions based upon this consideration. The issue of arbitration is one in which this is apparent, with the Cabinet not wishing initially to go down this road, but publicly blaming the miners for not doing so, and delaying the decision to undertake arbitration until it was forced to appoint the Wilberforce Inquiry to settle the dispute. The thesis will demonstrate that that the picketing during the strike was not primarily mass and militant picketing but that, rather, the majority of the picketing against coal movement was predominantly small scale and incident free often involving negotiations between pickets and those trying to cross picket lines. This picketing began on a small scale but subsequently diverged between small *token* pickets on the one hand and larger scale more *interventionist* picketing on the other where small-scale picketing was found to be ineffectual.

The miners' victory will be shown to have resulted from the curtailing of coal transportation, primarily the blockading of power stations, for which the Government was completely unprepared. The thesis will show that the supply of coal to priority consumers was an issue for all sides throughout the dispute and played a significant role in the manipulation of public opinion. The picketing against officials and clerical staff will also be shown to have been a source of divergence between the leadership and the pickets who widely disregarded the national directives, whilst serving to highlight differing views on the future of the industry. The miners received support from other trade unionists, students and members of the public, and the thesis shows this to have been invaluable, and that it largely arose following face to face interaction on the picket lines rather than at leadership level. The strike also effectively gained impetus from mass protests against the Heath Government's Industrial Relations Bill the previous year. A numerically significant proportion of the support that the miners received derived from engineers in Birmingham during the confrontation at Saltley, which, though not instrumental in resolving the dispute, became the epitome of the strike and a sign of the strength of the organised working class. The thesis will consider the

charge that the strike was a 'victory for violence' and show that the picketing of coal stocks that won the strike was in fact largely peaceful, though with a small number of high-profile mass pickets, such as Saltley and Longannet. However, the Government came to identify mass picketing with intimidation, and intimidation with violence. It will be shown that this was part of a broader redefinition of 'intimidation', itself part of a move towards classifying strikes as inherently subversive.

### 1.5 Political Background

This thesis will examine the 1972 strike within the context of trade union and labour movement politics which, in Britain, is dominated by the Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, the CP. The leadership of the NUM is drawn from these parties and since its inception has been dominated by a coalition of right-wing (Labour) Areas - Yorkshire, Lancashire, Durham, Northumberland and Nottinghamshire - with a small left-wing (CP) minority primarily in Scotland and South Wales, and to some extent Derbyshire and Kent. Immediately prior to the strike the CP was still the major activist force in the Scottish and Welsh coalfields and there was a left group of eight members on the NUM's twenty-six strong National Executive Committee (NEC). Labour controlled all the key NUM institutions whilst the CP twice won the post of general secretary but nevertheless operated within the constraints of the Union's balance.[7]

The period immediately prior to the strike saw the breakdown of the post-nationalisation pattern of NUM politics based on cold-war divisions, which had dominated NUM internal political process, and in which the CP and the left of the Labour Party had been reluctant to work together.[8] The thaw in these relations was primarily prompted by changes in the international position of communist parties, occasioned initially by Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's crimes in 1956 and later by the crushing of the Prague Spring and the stifling of the French general strike, both in 1968. These events discredited the Stalinist communist

[7] Howell, D., *The Politics of the NUM: A Lancashire view*, (Manchester, 1989) pp.9-10; Harman, C., *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London, 1988) p.237; McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party', p.229

[8] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, pp.1 & 26

parties and created an existential crisis for the CP that saw a haemorrhaging of members and an upsurge of interest in its nemesis, Trotskyism, which represented a communism untainted by the crimes of Stalinism. The broader events of '1968', including anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, radical student sit-ins and occupations, and general strikes involving the French and Italian working classes, had dominated world politics and radicalised students and workers alike. The discrediting of the CP in the global events around '1968' led, in Britain, to a rightward realignment of the party towards a working alliance with the Labour Party on a Broad Left platform.

The CP's *British Road to Socialism* marked the 'formal abandonment of a revolutionary path', with its 1968 version proclaiming 'that new political alignments will come about and create the conditions for the election of a Parliamentary majority and government pledged to a socialist programme'.[9] This openly eschewed a revolutionary programme in favour of a peaceful road to socialism with a focus on 'the people' and the need for a 'Broad Popular Alliance' based on trade unions and the industrial working class, but also a mobilisation of the middle class.[10] Whilst this document may have marked the CP's formal abandonment of revolutionary aspirations, its actual abandonment of a revolutionary programme goes back to the 1920s and 1930s, in the period immediately after the death of Lenin. At that point the Communist International (Comintern / Third International), the umbrella organisation of communist parties globally, under external pressure from world imperialism, rejected internationalism and proclaimed a nationalist turn towards 'socialism in one country', which led to the discrediting and subsequent liquidation of any that disagreed with this policy, primarily the revolutionary current within the International, namely the Trotskyist Left Opposition. This nationalist turn by Stalin led to the communist parties throughout the world becoming appendages of the foreign policy of the USSR, which in turn affected their relationship with, and subordination to, the trade union bureaucracy and mainstream social democrats such as the British Labour Party.

[9] Communist Party of Great Britain, *British Road to Socialism*, (London, 1968) p.6, cited in Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.29

[10] McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party', p.217

The Stalinist Comintern subsequently swung towards the ultra-left sectarian policies of the so-called Third Period, which represented a demoralised response to the rise of fascism, and in which social democracy was portrayed as the twin evil of the Nazis and labelled 'social fascism'. The German CP was subsequently instructed not to join with the social democrats in opposing Hitler, in contradiction to the position of the Trotskyists; this split the working class and paved the way for the rise of the Nazis. This led the Trotskyists to reject the possibility of reforming the Comintern and became the impetus for the formation of the Fourth International. Within two years of the German defeat, Stalin rejected the Third Period policies and moved toward the class collaborationist position of popular frontism, which subordinated the CPs and the working class to the 'democratic' bourgeoisie, i.e. the mainstream social democratic parties. This was to have particularly severe consequences in the Spanish civil war, where the CP transitioned from a nominal revolutionary party to an actual counter-revolutionary and aided the social democrats in strangling the revolution.

The wildly erratic policies of the Comintern and its changing view on and relationship with social democracy led to a fractious, distrustful and inconsistent relationship between the CP and the Labour Party for several decades. In Britain, whilst the CP continued to pursue a 'wage militancy' under its control, it fought against militants who challenged the system. For its part, Labour also wished to contain the militancy emerging in the ranks, an outlook it shared with the CP, and both parties sought to channel discontent towards the election/re-election of a Labour government. The CP and left-Labour subsequently effectively operated on a Broad Left platform as the centre-left wing of the Labour Party.[11] In the period before the strike, the CP had been moving increasingly towards promoting Broad Left factions, as opposed to official CP groupings, within British trade unions in a drive to 'get inside' and operate the official machinery. In addition, its general support for militant policies within the workplace was subordinated to its electoral strategy, i.e. support for a Labour Government. The militant officials who were promoted and elected by the CP would often subsequently lose their militancy once in office, but the CP continued to defend them against criticism. This process promoted illusions in left-wing union leaders, and consequently disarmed workers at critical moments. By 1970 a cohesive alliance existed

[11] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.26

between the CP and the Labour Party, 'in which political allegiances only rarely obtruded'.[12] Darlington and Upchurch argue that weakness of the CP's Broad Left strategy was that it placed emphasis on winning left-wing control rather than on the building of strong rank-and-file organisation, whereas, they note, the 1972 miners' strike was won despite the right-wing leadership of Joe Gormley, primarily because

> the independent initiative and momentum from below… was so powerful. By contrast, the miners suffered their greatest defeats under the left-wing presidency of Arthur Scargill, arising from the relative weakness of rank-and-file organisation within the NUM (and among trade unionists generally) by the early 1980s.[13]

Darlington and Upchurch partly miss the point here in arguing that it was a 'weakness' of CP strategy not to build strong rank-and-file organisations, since this assumes that the CP wanted strength in the ranks, whereas its history shows that it was striving for the opposite – strong Party control over the ranks, and a stifling of unofficial militancy, in order to promote its own agenda of accommodation with mainstream social democracy, including the peaceful road to a Labour Government. Within the NUM, the realignment of left politics in the period before the strike took the form of the development of an autonomous left group, which had formed initially in 1963 following discontent at the right-Labour partisanship of the majority of the leadership. It was viewed as clandestine and possibly subversive by the leadership, and was led by CP members Will Paynter (general secretary) and Bill Whitehead (South Wales Area president) and involved Communists and academics, such as Vic Allen, who would later become a thorn in the side of the Thatcher Government. It held meetings in Yorkshire and Derbyshire and produced 'A Plan for the Miners' that was presented to the NUM annual conference in 1964 and set out future policies for the miners over a number of issues. By 1967 this important organisational innovation had expanded to become more broadly representative and included officials, such as Scargill, and left-wing activists and militants throughout the coalfield. It resolved to unite around Daly as the left's candidate for general secretary against the right's candidate Gormley who had been the NUM representative on the Labour Party

[12] McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party', p236; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.29-30; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.145

[13] Darlington, R. & Upchurch, M., 'A Reappraisal of the Rank-and-File versus Bureaucracy Debate', *Capital & Class*, 2011, Vol.36, No.1, p.87

NEC since 1963. Daly had been in the CP until 1956 and then played a leading role in the Fife Socialist League, a product of the New Left, before joining the Labour Party in 1962. He produced a pamphlet 'The Miners and the Nation', which criticised Labour's failure to deliver on promises made whilst in opposition and advocated a more militant attitude in defence of miners' interests including industrial action.

The period of the Wilson Government coincided with a radicalisation of politics and an upsurge in political protest globally, which culminated in the events of '1968' and led to a discrediting of the politics of both the CP and of mainstream social-democrats such as the Labour Party. Thus, at the point when the industrial policies of the Wilson premiership were causing a growing discontent, their politics were also being discredited. Daly won the election, but subsequently subordinated himself to the NUM's constitution and policy in denouncing the unofficial nature of the strikes in 1969 and 1970. This led to open hostility from his erstwhile supporters particularly in Yorkshire, who interpreted this as a betrayal. Gormley subsequently stood for and won the NUM presidency. He was hostile to the CP, and to the left in general, but recognised that he would have to adapt to the new climate. In campaigning for the presidency in 1970 he emphasised his agreement with Daly and sought a rapprochement with the left, acknowledging their influence and his belief that the Broad Left's integration into the NUM political process was necessary, and that integration would also help control the left.[14] His hostility to the left led him subsequently to liaise with MI5 and warn Heath of its growing influence in the NUM.[15] During the strike Employment Secretary Robert Carr saw a clear division between the 'militant' Daly and the 'moderate' Gormley, which he believed increased the difficulty of promoting new negotiations.[16] However, there was less between them than perceived by Carr, and Daly, who was opposed to militancy if it operated outside of the rules, used militant rhetoric essentially to raise his credentials amongst miners disillusioned with his apparent betrayals during the unofficial strikes.

[14] McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party', pp.228-9; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer,* pp.32-3; Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, pp.8-9 & 139-41; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, pp.27, 34-5 & 156; Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*, pp.19-20

[15] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.217; BBC 'True Spies', Oct-Nov 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/true_spies/

[16] The National Archives (TNA): Cabinet Office (CAB)128/50/5, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 27 January 1972

## 1.6 Class Conflict

This thesis will consider the conduct of the strike within the context of class struggle since an analysis of the 1972 miners' strike - a dispute between the government and the one of the largest sections of the organised working class - is incomprehensible outside of an acceptance of the class nature of society. The miners, as workers in a nationalised industry undertaking manual labour in a low wage environment, were overwhelmingly working class and considered themselves to be so. This manifested during the strike in a number of ways: in their references to themselves as working class; in their identification as trade unionists in their appeal for support from other trade-unionists; in their claim to be the vanguard of the trade union movement in the struggle against the Conservative Government; in their admission of 'blind loyalty' to the Labour Party; in the students' identification of the miners' dispute as a working class struggle and the miners' attempts ultimately to distance their struggle from that of the students; in the massive support miners received from the public even in the face of other workers being laid off; and in the Birmingham engineers identification of their joint struggle with the miners as a working class struggle. The identification of the strike as a class struggle manifests not only in identifying the government as the focus of the dispute in its role as employer, but also in seeing government policy as the focus of protest. The approach and actions of the government itself also identifies the dispute as a class struggle: in its legislation to control and contain the unofficial and militant element of the trade unions, and to strengthen the hand of the trade union leadership to undertake this role; in its identification of public sector wages as the root cause of inflation and the mechanisms it introduced to contain this; in the double-standard it applied to MPs wages, which appeared exempt from its inflation control mechanism; in the changes introduced and proposed for the policing of industrial disputes, which demonstrate an intolerance of the right to strike; in its view of strikes as subversive; and in the legislation introduced and proposed in relation to welfare benefits, which demonstrate a lack of compassion for the lowest paid and a further attempt to make victorious strikes less likely. Any one of these aspects can be dismissed, but *in toto* they amount to a clear view of this strike as a class struggle.

Trade unions have played a crucial role in society in defending the rights of their members in the age-old conflict between employers and employees, and have

rightly come to be seen, by workers, as something to be defended. However, as Hyman notes, the central contradiction of trade unions is that they both make possible the consolidation and effectiveness of resistance but also make resistance more manageable and predictable, and can therefore undermine struggle.[17] This thesis will argue that the desires and actions of the leaderships of trade unions, in particular the NUM, are often at odds with the desires and actions of the workforce that they represent. This proceeds from the view that the political and economic interests of workers and employers, or management, are distinct, and though there is some common interest, their essential interests are in conflict with one another. A union (and in particular the union leadership) operates as a liaison between workers and management representing the interests of one to the other and its interests and role are distinct from each of the others (this is discussed further below). The leadership of the NUM worked closely with the Board to promote the interests of the coal industry, even at the point when this ceased to be in the interests of the workforce. In the run-up to the 1972 strike, workers had begun to say that the interests of the industry, in contracting whilst keeping wages at competitively low rates, were no longer their interests, and they began to challenge the NUM's view that to take industrial action would simply accelerate this process. During the strike there was a clear distinction between the operation and outlook of the national leadership of the NUM and that of the miners on the picket lines who, though varying in their politics and in their militancy, showed a tendency towards militant action in defiance of the leadership.

## 1.7 Review of the Sources

### 1.7.1 Unpublished Primary Sources

This thesis has drawn on a wide variety of primary sources, both published and unpublished. The unpublished primary sources are largely those located at the National Archives at Kew, though other archives around the country have also been consulted. The sources at the National Archives were primarily those from the Cabinet Office (CAB series), the National Coal Board (COAL), the Home Office (HO), the Department of Employment (LAB), the Department of Energy,

[17] Hyman, R., 'Class Struggle and the Trade Union Movement', in Coates, D., Johnston, G. & Bush, R., (Eds.), *A Socialist Anatomy of Britain*, (Oxford, 1985) p.104

Electrical Division (POWE) and the Prime Minister's Office (PREM). Within these the thesis makes particular use of the daily Progress Report on the Coal Strike produced by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), which summarised for example developments, stock positions, picketing, press reports, and priority supply, and fed into the Cabinet. These are referred to within the thesis as 'DTI report', and within the footnotes as PRCS. The thesis also draws on the 'Historical Note and Record' of the strike produced by the DTI, which gives an in-depth analysis of the strike based on departmental records. A handwritten note on the cover declares that it to be 'a valuable record' which 'will certainly be required in the event of any future strikes.' It is referred to throughout the thesis as the 'DTI post-mortem'. The thesis has also used (or 're-used') existing oral history sources from several archives.

### 1.7.2 Oral History

I had initially considered undertaking oral history interviews with participants in the strike, but began by consulting existing oral sources that covered this period, in particular the Millennium Memory Bank, at the British Library and the National Mining Museum in Wakefield, both of which have a number of interviews with ex-miners. However, these essentially amount to a very brief review of each participant's life in the industry, with almost no reference to the 1972 strike, though there were some recollections which merged and confused the strike with the subsequent 1974 strike. What became clear was that the miners who were interviewed had scant memory of the 1972 strike, though the 1984-85 strike remained a clearer memory for some. Had I undertaken interviews these would have been conducted from 2015, when the age of the participants would have ranged between *circa* sixty and ninety years old. My main interest in using oral history had been to include the experience of those involved in the strike, rather than a study in what was, or was not, remembered of that period. I therefore took a decision to use, or re-use, existing oral history, which had been undertaken when the memory of the events was still relatively fresh, that is to say interviews that were undertaken shortly after the strike. Clearly there are still problems with remembering the near past but these are considerably less of a problem, for my requirements, when compared to memories of the distant past. The thesis has, therefore, drawn on previously existing oral sources taken shortly after the strike,

primarily interviews conducted by the Banner Theatre of Actuality and the South Wales Coalfield History Project. The Birmingham based Banner Theatre of Actuality interviews, are held at the Library of Birmingham.[18] Banner conducted interviews during 1973 and 1974 of a number of participants in the events at Saltley coke depot during the strike. These included miners from Yorkshire, South Wales and the West Midlands, and Birmingham engineering workers, and union officials, in order to create a stage production entitled 'Saltley Gate', which was first performed in 1976. Banner's approach was to utilise the actual testimony of the participants, hence the term 'actuality', and it was intended as a celebration of the events at Saltley, and its representation as a working-class victory. The South Wales Coalfield History Project conducted interviews under the auspices of University College, Swansea. This, in part, fed into the production of a report and 'initial history' entitled 'The Miners' Strike, 1972: a report and initial history', a copy of which is held in in the Charles Parker Archive at the Library of Birmingham.[19] Interviews took place between December 1972 and April 1973 with around twenty strike committees and union officials directly involved in the strike in South Wales in order to give an insight into the strike, which is viewed as 'an important episode in the history of the British working-class movement.'

Given the declared aim of both of these projects to celebrate the strike as a working-class victory, this presents potential problems in the re-use of these oral history archival sources. These include the perceived bias of the interviewers in both the selection of participants and in the line of questioning, and also the potential for subjective editing by the interviewers, though in the case of the Banner project the archive holds the original unedited transcripts. The testimonies themselves present some potential problems of memory, though both projects conducted interviews whilst the events were a relatively recent memory, and were, for example, prior to Scargill's 1975 *New Left Review* interview, which coloured some later accounts.[20] There is also a potential problem of whether participants in a mass protest such as Saltley, or in the picketing of officials and clerical workers, which included some aggressive behaviour, might alter their testimony to either minimise or enhance their own role in the events, or overplay the importance of working-class solidarity.

[18] Library of Birmingham (LB): MS1611, Banner Theatre of Actuality
[19] LB: MS4000, Charles Parker Archive
[20] Scargill, A, 'The New Unionism', Interview, *New Left Review*, Vol.1, No.92, Jul-Aug 1975

The debate surrounding the re-use of qualitative data is extensive, and a portion of this debate is discussed by Gallwey.[21] Critics who have drawn attention to problems in the re-use of qualitative data include Mauthner and Parry, who argue, essentially, that 'secondary analysis is fundamentally flawed because subsequent users do not possess the same level of knowledge as primary researchers about the context in which the data is originally collected', and that even where supporting materials are provided the findings remain highly questionable. Hammersley has also highlighted the unique relationship between original researcher and primary data, and has thus reasserted the fundamental distinction between primary and secondary research and the indispensability of terms such as 'secondary analysis' and 're use'. Moore has challenged Mauthner and others within the social scientific community who are resistant to 're-use' in arguing that data are being constructed in the process of a new research project, and that the methodological and disciplinary boundaries in the concept of 're-use' should be collapsed in favour of speaking of how researchers 'use' data. Gallwey sees the arguments for and against 're-use' in part as a division between two schools of thought, with the 'positivist' tradition of, for example Mauthner, against the 'phenomenological' approach of, for example Moore. Bishop argues similarly about the debate surrounding re-use: 'In some cases, I suspect that the primary / secondary debate has become a proxy for other debates: positivism / interactionism, realism / post-modernism, subjectivity / authorial authority, and even academic freedom / neo-managerialism'.[22]

[21] Gallwey, A., 'The rewards of using archived oral histories in research: the case of the Millennium Memory Bank', *Oral History*, Vol.41, No.1, Archives, Spring 2013, pp.37-50

[22] Mauthner, N.S., Parry, O. & Backett-Milburn, K., 'The data are out there, or are they? Implications for archiving and revisiting qualitative data', *Sociology*, Vol.32, No.4, 1998, pp.733-45; Parry, O. & Mauthner, N.S., 'Whose data are they anyway? Practical, legal and ethical issues in archiving qualitative research data', *Sociology*, Vol.38, No.1, 2004, pp.139-52; Parry, O. & Mauthner, N.S., 'Back to basics: who re-uses qualitative data and why?', *Sociology*, Vol.39, No.2, 2005, pp.337-42; Hammersley, M., 'Can We Re-Use Qualitative Data via Secondary Analysis? Notes on Some Terminological and Substantive Issues', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol.15, No.1, 2010, pp.1-7; Moore, N., 'The Contexts of Context: Broadening Perspectives in the (Re)use of Qualitative Data', *Methodological Innovations Online*, Vol.1, No.2, 2006, pp.21-32; Moore, N., '(Re)Using Qualitative Data?', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol.12, No.3, 2006, pp.21-32; Bishop, L., 'A Reflexive Account of Reusing Qualitative Data: Beyond Primary/Secondary Dualism', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol.12, No.3, 2007, pp.1-14, all referenced in Gallwey, 'The rewards of using archived oral histories in research'

### 1.7.3 Police Telexes

The thesis has made use of a significant primary source, which, to my knowledge, has hitherto not been analysed. This source is a bundle of telexes sent by the various constabularies in England and Wales to the Home Office during the strike, following the Home Secretary's request for information on picketing in each force area.[23] This request stated that the Home Office desired a report of any disorder or threat of disorder by pickets, and in addition a weekly general assessment of the location and extent of picketing.[24] The telexes sent in response has created a very useful resource, which allows an analysis of the picketing that occurred, by place and time, by types of establishment picketed, and by the behaviour of the pickets. It also allows consideration of the differing responses by the various constabularies. The telexes are not a complete record, as the reports from some forces are no longer on record. This may be because the force concerned did not send a report each week, perhaps in part due to there being nothing to report, or that the report has gone missing, or has been sent elsewhere. The information provided varies widely, and perhaps represents the attitude of the relevant constabulary or the level of difficulty in garnering the information requested. The memo that relayed the request from F6 division of the Home Office, who were party to the Ministerial Committee on Emergencies meeting, to F4 division, who were responsible for contacting the chief constables (CCs) sheds light on this issue. Buttery (from F6) noted that at the meeting he had raised 'grave misgivings' about the requirement for CCs to provide information on the nature and extent of picketing, but that he had been overruled and 'sold down the river by the Metropolitan Police representative', who had said that there would be no problem in providing this type of information.[25] Buttery's concern must, in part, have been based on a belief in the difficulty of gathering information on picketing, especially in larger force areas, or where there were many potential sites that could be picketed. This is borne out by the fact that the constabularies whose reports have least detail are those whose areas are geographically large and difficult to police or contain many collieries, namely South Wales, Dyfed Powys, or the Yorkshire county constabularies. In respect of the latter, the West Yorkshire Constabulary sent only very general remarks with little detail and the

[23] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English and Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 17 January - 14 February 1972
[24] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Hilary to Chief Constables, 13 January 1972
[25] TNA: HO325/101, Memo, Buttery to Hilary, 12 January 1972

only other parts of Yorkshire that responded were the Sheffield and Rotherham, and Leeds City forces, which restricted reports to incidents within their city boundaries. This appears to confirm Buttery's view that some of the constabularies would find it difficult or onerous to give the kind of assessment required by the Home Secretary.

At least one hundred and thirty telexes were received during the following five weeks, from almost all of the constabularies in England and Wales, one hundred and sixteen of which are on record. There is evidence that some of the original telexes are missing: with five being absent but referred to on a subsequent telex; and nine missing for some weeks from forces that reported picketing activity each week. A reasonable assumption, therefore, is that there must have been activity in these intervening weeks, and thus also reports, though these reports are not on file. There are also forces, such as Nottinghamshire Constabulary, which is known to have had regular picketing activity, but where only one weekly report is present. In these instances, one might presume that there were reports issued, but I have not made any assumption on the content of the missing reports within my analysis or count, as there are no 'intervening' weeks on which to base this. In the first week two forces submitted 'Nil reports', despite Hilary's note that this was not necessary, with Hampshire Constabulary noting 'A negative report from all divisions', and Bedfordshire and Luton Constabulary, reporting 'No picketing or other incidents within this Force Area'. The one hundred and fourteen reports that did note picketing activity were sent from twenty-nine separate police forces, though not each force reported activity each week. This is particularly the case for those that were not in a coalfield area. The Home Office decided to discontinue the need for the constabularies to report after the fourth week, as it believed that it was learning nothing of importance.[26] In addition to information on the nature and extent of picketing, the reports also detail protests and rallies that took place, and refer to the support that the pickets received from others, notably, power station workers, other trade unionists and students. The reports also shed light on the question of the pickets' response to safety and maintenance of the pits during the strike, and on the question of the delivery of coal to priority consumers, such as hospitals, schools and the elderly.

[26] TNA: HO325/101, Note, McQueen to Hilary, 21 January 1972

The reports vary considerably with regard to detail, ranging from one of Durham Constabulary's reports, which contains a daily assessment with named premises and picket numbers, to West Yorkshire Constabulary, whose reports, each week, simply state: 'Picketing taking place at collieries, power stations and workshops throughout this Force Area. No major trouble being experienced.' The one hundred and fourteen police telexes that report activity can broadly be divided into two types: 'area only' reports, which give no site details, but rather make a general comment on picketing activity within the force area; and 'site specific' reports, which give details on particular sites, or premises, that have been picketed. Even within these two broad types there is quite significant variation, and also some crossover, with a number of telex reports mentioning particular site activity, but also making general area comments. There are twenty-three 'area only' telexes, twenty of which report orderly picketing, two of which mention only that picketing continued to take place, with a presumption that there was, therefore, no disorder, and one which reports a general threat. There are eighty-seven 'site specific' reports, seventy-four of which report no incidents, two that cite picketing activity with no comment on disorder, three which describe specific incidents, and four which have a combination of sites, some with disorder and others peaceful. There are nine hundred and forty-eight picketing 'events' mentioned over the five weeks of reporting, across three hundred and seventy separate locations. The picketing events consist of five hundred and seventy named sites, three hundred and five un-named sites, fifty-eight multi-day references, and fifteen additional site entrances picketed. It includes sites mentioned on several occasions (e.g. each week) but does not count a site more than once per week if it is included in a general weekly report, only if the report specifically refers to several days at one site. For example, a site that is picketed six days a week, is counted only once if mentioned within a general weekly report, but counted several times, if the report is set out as such, or if several dates are mentioned. Of these nine hundred and forty-eight events, only fourteen mention any level of threat or disorder.

In formulating the spreadsheets that I have used to create the graphs and charts in this thesis, I have had to make certain assumptions. The detail on the numbers of pickets that was recorded in the telexes varied considerably, with some giving exact numbers when they were small enough to count but figures rounded to the nearest ten or fifty or hundred when they are larger. In terms of picket numbers,

some of the reports refer to the size of the picket without giving exact numbers, and use terms such as ‘small’, ‘token’, ‘few’, ‘limited degree’, ‘spasmodic’, ‘reasonable’, ‘minimum’ or ‘normal’. In each of these cases I have assumed that the numbers are fewer than twenty pickets, though they are probably smaller still. Where the reports refer to ‘not more than…’ or ‘…max’, I have taken the cited figure. In general, and given the fact that the vast majority of sites displayed peaceful picketing, I have erred on the side of the smaller number in order not to further minimise the extent of incidents that took place by inflating the number of sites with peaceful picketing. In some reports no figures are given unless they are very large, implying that when the figure is not cited it is because it is not large. In respect of the types of establishment picketed, and the number of days that they were picketed in any week, I have also made some assumptions. Where power stations have been picketed and where reference is made to 24-hour picketing I have assumed the picketing took place seven days a week, as was requested by the NEC. In both these instances I have taken any mitigation into account. All other picketing is assumed to take place six days a week, which accords with the figures that are recorded. Therefore, comments such as ‘during this week’, ‘throughout this week’, ‘daily’, ‘pickets maintained’, have been counted as six days unless there is mitigation. Some reports refer to such mitigation as ‘at various times’, ‘periodical’, ‘sporadic’ in which case I have assumed half or three days, unless further mitigation. Similar assumptions have been made with respect to the sites visited. So, for example, where the reports do not give a daily breakdown of sites and numbers, they may make comments such as ‘some of the’, ‘various’, ‘several’ or ‘not all locations on any one day’. In these cases, I have assumed half of those previously mentioned, or for half of the time. Some reports refer to a plural, such as ‘depots’, ‘coal-yards’, ‘collieries’, and in these situations, I have assumed a minimum of two, and therefore counted two, though there may well have been significantly more than two.

## 1.8 Published Sources

### 1.8.1 Overview of the Literature

The published sources used in this thesis are largely secondary sources, though there are some primary sources included, notably Malcolm Pitt's account of the strike from the point of view of a Kent miner, and the account by Vic Allen, an academic and active participant in much of the debate amongst miners. The secondary literature with a bearing on this thesis is wide and varied. There are a huge number of books and articles concerning the 1970s and the Heath Government[27] and a vast historiography on trade unions and industrial relations, from general histories to specialised economic studies,[28] though these tend to make little detailed reference to the 1972 strike itself. The literature relevant to this thesis can broadly be divided into four categories:

General histories of the British coal industry since nationalisation

Studies concerned directly with the 1972 miners' strike

Literature focusing on the history and politics of the NUM

Reviews of the rank-and-file versus bureaucracy debate.

### 1.8.2 General Histories of the Coal Industry

General studies of the coal industry since nationalisation have tended to consider the challenges facing the industry: its initial struggle to retain the workforce after the war and to keep up with the demand for coal; its reaction to the decline in demand and the subsequent contraction of the industry; the competition from

[27] For example, Whitehead, P., *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies*, (London, 1985); Morgan, K.O., *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989*, (Oxford, 1990); Ball, S. & Seldon, A., *The Heath Government 1970-74: A Reappraisal*, (London, 1996); Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, (London, 2009)

[28] For example, Taylor, R., *The Fifth Estate: Britain's Unions in the Seventies*, revised edn., (London, 1980); Barnes, D. & Reid, E., *Governments and Trade Unions: The British Experience, 1964-79*, (London, 1980); Dorfman, G.A., *Government versus Trade Unionism in British Politics since 1968*, (London, 1979); Wigham, E., *Strikes and the Government 1893-1974*, (London, 1976)

other fuels; industrial relations during the contraction; and the subsequent strikes of the early 1970s. Two works that can be considered histories officially sanctioned by the NCB are those by Ashworth and by Berkovitch. Of these, Ashworth's work is the standard history and the fifth of a five-volume Oxford history of the coal industry, and covers the period from nationalisation up to 1982.[29] This vast study was initiated and supported by the NCB, and draws almost exclusively from NCB and government departmental records, with little use of trade union sources. Ashworth notes that nationalisation raised such high expectations within the industry, that it simply had to be made to work. Part of this process was modernisation, including the closure of uneconomic pits, and he argues that there was a general acceptance of this by the miners, and by their union leaders, in particular concerning the issues around pit transfer schemes, and the government and NCB's commitments to meet the associated social obligations. The study takes a broad historical sweep, and therefore lacks detailed analysis of certain aspects including of the 1972 strike itself, which it views as following from the complicating changes in the wage structure that united the interests of the mineworkers in aggressive national action.

A similar, though briefer, appraisal comes from Berkovitch, who worked as an advisor within the industry.[30] He considers successive governments de-prioritisation of coal in the face of growing competition from oil, gas, and nuclear power, and the subsequent decline in demand for coal, and sees the 1964 Labour Government's modernisation agenda as producing a conflict between its pre-election commitment to maintaining the size of the coal industry, and subsequent departmental pressures for a free market for fuel. Berkovitch gives a rather brief treatment of the 1972 strike, which he describes as 'unfortunate' in that it clashed with the 25th anniversary of nationalisation. He notes that the strike turned a prospective operating profit into an operating loss of £118 million, and that the Board made a number of vain attempts to find a compromise between the NUM's demand and what it considered the commercial possibilities, in order to head off this severe setback for the industry. He cites the declining position of miners' wages relative to other industrial workers as the cause of the strike, and their

[29] Ashworth, W., *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol.5, 1946-1982: The Nationalised Industry*, (Oxford, 1986)
[30] Berkovitch, I., *Coal on the Switchback: The Coal Industry since Nationalisation*, (London, 1977)

success in the dispute as due to the picketing campaign throughout the country. He notes that the strike left the Board with three major problems: a 'massive' deterioration in its financial position; a fall in sales aggravated by a loss of reliability in supplies; and damaged industrial relations. Berkovitch acknowledges the Wilson Government's willingness to provide funds to speed the closure of uneconomic pits, and blames the failure of the modernisation process on the decline in demand for coal, but fails to acknowledge that the decline in demand was itself the product of government modernisation agenda and the shift towards alternative forms of energy.

An earlier study of the coal industry is provided by Jackson, who considers the changes in the 'market' position of the industry. It was written just after the 1974 miners' strike, and looks at the fortunes of the coal industry from the immediate post-war period when demand was growing to the subsequent shrinking of consumption from the mid-1950s.[31] Jackson cites frustration in the rank-and-file at the NUM's support for the NCB during the 1940s and 1950s, which contributed to a number of unofficial strikes in immediate post-war period. He notes significantly fewer strikes between 1959 and 1970 than in the earlier period, but believes that this was not due to greater support for the union, but rather to the reduction in the size of the labour force; the replacement of piecework with day wages; and to the run-down of the industry and miners' fear of losing their jobs. He claims that despite the rank-and-file being stunned by the collapse in the industry's fortunes from the late 1950s, there is little evidence to show an increase in hostility towards the NCB or NUM, and such discontent as existed, was directed towards the government. Jackson notes that production and consumption of coal fell consistently throughout the 1960s until the turn of the decade when there was a shortage. This coincided with the cost of oil starting to increase, due to problems of supply in the Middle East, which made coal far more competitive. Middle Eastern oil is widely discussed as a prime factor in the 1974 miners' strike, but Jackson discusses it also in relation to the 1972 dispute. He argues that the miners, seeing an opportunity in the changed market conditions, pressed for their highest ever wage increases following the NUM's 1970 conference. Unofficial strike action followed, which was a curtain raiser for the official strike that began the following year over an even higher wage demand. The industry

[31] Jackson, M.P., *The Price of Coal*, (London, 1974)

seemed to be enjoying an improvement in its market position - few felt that this would last, but nevertheless felt that they should take advantage of this upturn whilst they could. Jackson's is a useful work though a little dated, not least in arguing that miners also benefitted from living in separate or isolated communities, as they were not therefore subject to any backlash from an enraged public, which they may have been if they had lived among the wider population. The hypothesis of the 'isolated mass' expounded by Kerr and Siegel, whom Jackson cites, has been subsequently challenged by Church, Outram & Smith (see below), and by Gilbert who describes the diversity of settings in which miners lived, noting that even by the 1920s 'perhaps one in five of British miners did not live in single-industry mining towns or villages, and the proportion of miners who had to travel beyond their immediate locality for work increased as pits were closed.'[32]

Church, Outram and Smith's interdisciplinary study seeks to understand the nature of the solidarity shown by miners during the 1984-85 strike.[33] It notes that this solidarity lends some credence to the Kerr-Siegel model, which sees working class solidarity deriving from a 'largely homogenous undifferentiated mass', but also challenges it in noting that the solidarity varied between and within regions.[34] The Kerr-Siegel model, they note, has been challenged on a number of bases including differing experiences internationally, and for its failure to provide causal links between isolation and strike activity, but has nevertheless continued to command widespread acceptance. The Donovan Commission helped to change the view of industrial relations and the propensity to strike in industries such as mining, where the prevalence of piecework and solidaristic work groups, combined with high union membership.

Ackers and Payne's revisionist article challenges the dominant narrative of the coal industry as one of inexorable, ubiquitous class conflict, and focuses on memories from moderate, profitable collieries, drawn mainly from the central

[32] Gilbert, D, 'Imagined Communities and Mining Communities', *Labour History Review*, Vol.60, Part 2, 1995, p.52

[33] Church, R.A., Outram, Q. & Smith, D.N., 'Militancy of British Miners, 1893-1986 Interdisciplinary Problems and Perspectives', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.22, No.1, 1991, pp.49-66

[34] Kerr, C. & Siegel, A., 'The Interdisciplinary Propensity to Strike: An International Comparison', in Kornhauser, A., Dubin, R. & Ross, A.A., *Industrial Conflic*t, (New York, 1954)

Midlands coalfields, 'where, by and large, nationalization "worked" and industrial relations were good'.[35] They argue that coal historiography should shift its attention from the declining, peripheral coalfields of Scotland and Wales, to the 'more temperate zone' of middle England where coal seams were thickest, industrial relations co-operative, and the future of the post-war industry lay. They believe that there are fragments of evidence for this state of affairs, not only from the widely stereotyped 'moderate' Nottinghamshire collieries but also from the Warwickshire collieries and many others nation-wide. As these supposedly 'exceptional' fragments accumulate – individual miners, pits and coalfields – they call for a broader and deeper rethinking of social relationship in the post-war coal industry. In place of a militant majority 'betrayed' by small, isolated moderate minorities, they see a much closer contest, and the implication of this may be that historians should cease to regard Nottinghamshire as deviant and a marginal chapter in coal's story. They concede that militant miners clearly did exist, in substantial numbers, and concentrated at certain collieries; and in parts of the geographical and often economic 'periphery' the picture was very different than in the Midlands. However, bitter memories, militant attitudes and archaic collieries that were relics of the hand-got era had little future in a modern, mechanised coal industry based on a smaller number of capital-intensive super-pits where miners could earn high wages through incentive schemes. Ironically, they believe, the NCB's heightened sense of social responsibility slowed the closure of these loss-making collieries, damaging the economic prospects for the industry as a whole and sustaining militant traditions within the NUM, while its generous relocation policy spread the culture of discontent from the 'bad' pits to the 'good' ones. They note, in particular, that the new militant NUM leaderships in areas like Kent and Yorkshire hailed from the 'little Moscows' of Scotland and South Wales and carried the mood of discontent with them, clearly implying that militancy would not have developed independently in the receiving pits. They concede that their approach is deliberately exploratory and impressionistic, and note that they draw from about fifteen interviews of their own, mainly from miners from Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire collieries. This is a rather small sample, and they subsequently show that these fifteen include four NACODS deputies, two colliery managers, an NCB Area director, and just three face

[35] Ackers, P. & Payne, J., 'Before the storm: The experience of nationalization and the prospects for industrial relations partnership in the British coal industry, 1947-1972 – rethinking the militant narrative', *Social History*, Vol.27, No.2, 2002, pp.184-209

workers and two NUM officials. They claim that they did not deliberately look for moderate individuals and that two of those interviewed were striking miners during the 1984-85 dispute. This thesis too will argue that Nottinghamshire should not be considered as different from the other Areas as it is often regarded, (following the formation of the Nottinghamshire-based breakaway union the UDM in the latter stages and aftermath of the 1984-85 strike), but for the opposite reason than that put forward by Ackers and Payne. In the 1972 strike, pickets in Nottinghamshire were just as militant and determined to win the strike as any other Area, and in fact some of the more active mass pickets, and hostile attitude towards NACODS strike-breaking, took place there. It was, in fact, the re-introduction of the Area Incentive Scheme (AIS - the productivity component of wages) by the Wilson Government in 1977 that led to the militancy of the Nottinghamshire miners being diminished as they subsequently had more to lose.

### 1.8.3 Studies of the 1972 Miners' Strike

Studies with a focus on the 1972 strike itself include Pitt's personalised account of the strike from the point of view of the Kent miners, Darlington and Lyddon's assessment of the strike within their appraisal of 1972 more generally, Hughes' thesis comparing the 1972 and 1974 strikes, with a focus on the government's contingency planning, and Phillips study of the mass picket of Longannet power station. Pitt's account draws on his own experiences as a Kent miner who began work in 1972, and gives a passionate insider view of the strike.[36] The Kent coalfield was under CP leadership, and Pitt himself was a CP member. He begins with a brief history of the Kent coalfield, which was a latecomer to mining and drew miners from all around the country who brought with them a variety of traditions. He notes the effect of mining on miners' families, and the close bonds that develop amongst the miners in the dangerous conditions that pertain underground, where one might be reliant on workmates for one's life. Pitt gives a vivid account of the Kent miners' role in the strike, in which they were given prime responsibility for picketing the London power stations. He describes the development of the strike as the miners were obliged to first discover the depots

[36] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979)

and coal using facilities in their Area, and then seek to make contact with local trade unionists for assistance in curtailing stock movement, and halting imports to the Kent docks. He shows how the miners used their own initiative and resources to mount mass pickets at docks and railway stocking yards, and in particular to curtail the movement of coal to the London power stations.

Darlington and Lyddon's study of class struggle in Britain in 1972 is a useful work, which devotes a chapter to the miners' strike, as one of the key disputes that year.[37] The authors, both industrial relations academics and long-standing members of the Socialist Workers Party, take 1972 as 'the high point of the strike wave in Britain during the years 1969-1974'. They cite below inflation wage rises - or actual cuts - and a national wage structure, which united miners for the first time in decades, as the causes of the strike. They see a key factor in the dispute as sufficient numbers of left-wing activists who believed in taking industrial action and making it work, and identify the main issues as the withdrawal of safety cover, the use of secondary picketing, and the solidarity action shown by other unions. They conclude that the miners were victorious due to several years of campaigning by the left within all levels of the union that had built the necessary strike majority, 'the spirit of aggression and zeal displayed by rank-and-file miners' exemplified by the use of flying and mass pickets during the strike, and that this encouraged the massive practical solidarity received from other trade unionists. The work, whilst supportive of individual militant communists, is critical of the CP *per se*. They discuss the official union leadership and the role of the TUC across all of the disputes mentioned, believing that these were run mainly from below, by rank-and-file activists. They see the miners' strike as an official dispute that went well beyond official NUM guidelines, with the picketing involving members on the ground making their own judgements as to what would make picket lines effective.

Hughes' thesis compares the 1972 and 1974 strikes, and examines both the manner in which the government's handling of the strikes was affected by the structure of the civil service machinery for managing emergencies, and the way in which the strikes laid the foundation for an overhaul of Whitehall contingency

[37] Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*

planning.[38] She contends that the government's defeat in 1972 shook the government and the public's confidence in its ability to maintain law and order, and argues that the government faced an acute series of economic, social and political problems, which placed great strain on it during a period of changing political and economic landscape, and for which it was unprepared and had inadequate policy instruments. She argues that Labour and the Conservatives drew different lessons from the strikes, with the Tories vowing never again to be beaten by the unions, and Labour concluding that one can only govern with the consent of the unions. Hughes argues that from the perspective of thirty years later, after the Thatcher reforms and the decline of manufacturing industry, it is understandable that more weight should be given to the view that trade unions were not really as powerful as they once appeared. However, she found great ministerial and official apprehension at the tremendous negative power of the unions in the early 1970s and fear of the threat posed by industrial action to essential services and the normal life of the nation. She reasons that from the autumn of 1970 there was a definite sense among ministers and officials that they needed to win a major battle on public sector pay and a distinct element of anticipation of a confrontation fed into the preparations for contingency planning. She correctly argues that, although the mass picket at Saltley was undeniably significant politically, it did not directly affect the outcome the strike and the focus on Saltley has tended to deflect attention from other aspects of the crisis. However, she incorrectly contends, along with Heath and Thatcher, that the miners' victory was due to violent mass picketing. The thesis is generally sympathetic to governments *per se*, and to the Heath premiership in particular. It takes the 1972 strike as the starting point and does not consider the reasons why it took place. She assesses the Heath Government's response to growing trade union power, with the latter seen as the beginning of the process, but fails to acknowledge that trade unions' use of strikes was itself a response to previous government policy and legal changes.

Phillips provides a case study of the mass picketing of Longannet power station during the 1972 strike, where thirteen pickets were arrested on the unusual charge

[38] Hughes, R.A., '*Governing in Hard Times': The Heath Government and Civil Emergencies – the 1972 and the 1974 Miners' Strikes*, PhD Thesis, Queen Mary, London, 2012

of ‘mobbing and rioting’.[39] The miners generally viewed the arrests as vindictive, and one hundred and fifty gathered outside the court to protest the arrest and the refusal of bail. The mass picketing continued with some two thousand pickets facing around four hundred police officers. Social and political tension mounted, and there were eight further arrests. Fearing an escalation of events, the general secretaries of the TUC and the Scottish TUC appealed for calm, and Scottish mining MPs led a deputation to the Lord Advocate, the Government’s chief law officer in Scotland. He met the Crown Office and the chief constable, and secured an accelerated release of the miners the following day. Mass picketing and the blockading of power stations, such as that at Longannet, were a key feature of the strike, and Phillips argues that this show of force encouraged the view that trade unions wielded power irresponsibly, and that this was *ipso facto* a threat to public order. Phillips correctly takes issue with characterisation of the strike as ‘top down’ militancy enforced on an unwitting and unwilling rank-and-file, a view he claims was used to legitimise Conservative governments’ industrial relations legislation, and which is predicated on the ‘insecure premise’ that union leaders were largely responsible for strikes. He argues that strikes in most sectors were generally shaped more by the attitudes of union members than the inclinations of union leaders, who were obliged to respond to membership pressure to retain influence and credibility. Phillips concludes that authority was challenged at Longannet, but not seriously jeopardised, and even where order was threatened, relations were only strained rather than ruptured.

### 1.8.4 History and Politics of the NUM

The political background to the miners’ strike is considered in a number of works, some with a regional focus, such as those by Taylor, Howell and Catterall, others with a concentration on militancy and solidarity more broadly, such as those by Allen, Richards and Rutledge. Taylor, the son of the president of the Yorkshire miners during the 1984/85 strike, has written a number of works, notably a political history of the Yorkshire miners, and a two-volume work, of which the second volume covers the period 1969-1995 and can be considered an official

[39] Phillips, J., The 1972 miners' strike: popular agency and industrial politics in Britain. *Contemporary British History*, Vol.20, No.2, (2006) pp.187-207

NUM history of the period. This latter study contains a detailed narrative of the 1972 strike, and considers the causes of the strike to have been a legacy of pit closures, a sense of betrayal by the Labour Government, and the impact of wage restructuring, which had the effect of forging a national consciousness in the NUM that led to political change within the union and an increased level of wage militancy.[40] Taylor discusses the 1968 election for general secretary of the NUM, which saw the left coalescing around Daly's advocacy of a more militant stance from the union, in beating the right's candidate, Gormley. He notes that subsequently, despite some pressure on Daly to support the unofficial strike in 1969, he cited the need to work within the rules, especially regarding the required majority necessary for official strike action, which angered many of those on the left who had helped elect him. The 1972 dispute was, Taylor argues, the culmination of these political shifts which encouraged the emergence of a new leadership stratum that amalgamated elements of the old and new lefts in alliance with a national leadership that recognised the events of 1969-70 contained a danger of serious division unless the NUM could be quickly re-integrated. Both Gormley's and Daly's speeches to Conference in 1971 reflected growing frustration within the union. He notes also that a number of myths have gathered around Saltley, which was not typical of the strike and did not affect the outcome. He argues, correctly, that the crucial factor in the NUM's victory was the support from other unions, which made the picketing of the power stations so effective, though he makes little mention of the overtime ban, which preceded the strike.

Taylor's study of the Yorkshire miners addresses their relationship with the Labour Party at local and national level, the role of the Yorkshire miners in the strikes between 1969 and 1974, and the question of how Yorkshire came to be seen as the militant core of the NUM having transitioned from the political and industrial right of the union in the period since nationalisation.[41] He defines the right as those committed to a Labour Government, supportive of negotiation and conciliation, and keen to preserve the maximum number of jobs even if the cost were low wages. Whereas the left believed in industrial action to defend miners' interests, were opposed to too great a reliance on party politics, and were concerned to defend miners' standard of living believing that employment should

[40] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*
[41] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*

not, and could not, be guaranteed by low wages. The membership, he believes, could not be placed in either category, but tended to support the official leadership, though this was being eroded by the late 1960s. Taylor argues that there was strong pressure to abandon support for the Labour Government from 1964 and a growing belief in the failure of moderation. He reasons that the 1969 and 1970 strikes were as much against NUM policies as against the NCB, and that they witnessed the emergence of a new leadership prepared to use direct action against the government if necessary. The effect of these unofficial strikes was to push the NUM as a whole further to the left. The Heath Government's introduction of anti-union legislation helped the incipient unofficial militancy flower into official militancy, though the 1972 strike itself was organised and conducted by the membership and branch officials, and involved a wide-ranging intelligence network and contacts with other unions. Taylor argues that Yorkshire, as a part of the central coalfield, had not experienced the full impact of the closures until the mid-1960s. This, combined with the impact of wages in the Area being held back under the NPLA to allow other Areas to catch up, had caused growing discontent, which overcame the countervailing (moderate) tendencies in the region making its militancy all the more explosive. Despite its regional focus, this is a useful work, which gives an insight into the functioning of perhaps the most significant Area in the 1972 strike.

Howell's study is an interpretation of the politics of the NUM, with a focus on the North West (colloquially Lancashire), which was traditionally a right-wing Area and the initial power base of Gormley.[42] The book was written in the aftermath of the 1984-85 strike and considers this defeat for the miners. Howell initially analyses the early part of the twentieth century, when the attraction of Labour politics within the Lancashire coalfield was not a choice for socialism but rather a political means of countering a coalfield divided significantly along religious and ethnic lines. Lancashire thereafter represented a cautious Labour politics similar to County Durham, and subsequently stood on the right within the NUM. It was a peripheral and numerically declining coalfield, which provided no significant national leader until the election of Gormley to the national leadership in 1971. Howell notes that the incoming Wilson government in 1964 quickly crushed the miners' hopes for the stability of the industry in its zealous

[42] Howell, *The Politics of the NUM*

pursuit of the closure of uneconomic pits. Between 1960 and 1970 the Lancashire coalfield lost thirty-three pits and twenty thousand jobs, with six closures and five thousand eight hundred jobs in 1968 alone. Gormley developed a strategy of co-operation with the NCB to fight off closures, denounced militancy as a sure-fire way to lead to more closures, and encouraged emergent protests to swing behind efforts to make the pits more competitive. The national leadership, under Sidney Ford, meanwhile supported the Labour Government who were making these 'difficult decisions' about closures. By 1968 there began to be murmurings of discontent, with even traditionally moderate Areas such as Yorkshire voicing some criticism of the national leadership. As both the Lancashire representative on the NEC, and the NUM's Labour Party representative, Gormley's line of constructive criticism found support within these institutions, where his stock grew to the point of his being the leading right-wing candidate for elections to the national presidency in 1971, which he won. Gormley's replacement as Lancashire Area president was his protegé Sid Vincent, who was similarly vigilant in stopping the development of a significant left opposition. Howell gives a brief treatment of the 1972 strike. He notes that the left within the NUM was heavily influenced by the closures of the 1960s, but that neither they, nor the NUM as a whole, developed an effective strategy for combating closures. He notes that any national action that did emerge did so in spite of, rather than because of, the structure of the NUM.

Catterall's thesis, which draws upon the themes developed in Howell's work, concerns the nature of, and response to, industrial change (i.e. modernisation and rationalisation) in the Lancashire coalfield from 1945-1972.[43] It gives a concrete analysis of the close relationship between the NUM leadership and the Labour Party at both local and Area level, and begins by explaining the requirement for the newly nationalised industry to modernise and to lead the modernisation of the British economy in the face of its post-war decline. In this process, coal was squeezed by government economic priorities, which favoured a multi-fuel economy. This change was largely accepted by industrial and political opinion, and also by organised labour. The thesis assesses the response of the NUM, the Labour Party, and the rank-and-file, to this challenge, in particular in respect of

[43] Catterall, S.J., *The Lancashire Coalfield, 1945-1972: The Politics of Industrial Change*, DPhil Thesis, University of York, 2001

the consequences of industrial change in the Lancashire coalfield. Catterall notes that expectations amongst miners were raised by the advent of the 1964 Labour Government, which, however, then de-prioritised coal and began an accelerated closure programme under the guise of a modernisation agenda. The political left and right (CP and Labour) within the Lancashire Area NUM (NUMLA) agreed on the need for change, and any subsequent debate concerned only the specific impacts and pace of change, especially with respect to closures. Catterall refers to this consensus as the 'non-politics of industrial change'.[44] The thesis considers the impact that the experience of industrial change had on political change and industrial militancy in the late 1960s. It also examines the relationship between NUMLA and the Labour Party in the coalfield, and how significant NUMLA was in managing and containing opposition to industrial change. This took the form of astute political and industrial manoeuvrings, in particular by heading off militancy via productivity campaigns to save collieries slated for closure, and through increasing the miners' collaboration with the NCB. Catterall explains that, though the NUM's hopes for favoured treatment by the Wilson Government were quickly dashed, this did not turn the leadership against Labour, who still regarded it as their party and their Government, and that since they accepted the rationale for modernisation they were obliged to be compliant in implementing Labour's closure programme. He makes the point that there was really nowhere else for the miners, and the working class in general, to go but to the Labour Party. However, this led to a growing sense of betrayal and discontent, especially since closures were happening in spite of the co-operation and compliance afforded by the miners.

Allen's book concerns the political debate around miners' militancy.[45] The author was closely involved with the development of the autonomous left group of miners' in the sixties and was an academic advisor on mining issues throughout the period. He also had close ties to the CP and its industrial organiser, Bert Ramelson, and would become a thorn in the side of Margaret Thatcher in the 1984-85 strike. His polemic argues that the NCB, the NUM, and successive post-war governments have all misled the miners, initially in telling them that they had a stake in the future of the industry and were participating in post-war

[44] Catterall, *The Lancashire Coalfield*, p.13
[45] Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*

reconstruction, and again, following the fall in demand, due to the need to modernise the industry to compete against alternative fuels. He argues that miners were expected to show a depth of gratitude for nationalisation and for post-war progress. Allen is particularly hostile to Labour's 'slash and burn' policy under Wilson, which led to many pit closures, and to the NUM's collaboration with the NCB in implementing this. He sees no essential difference between the left and the right in the NUM, who both accepted the NCB's view of the need for modernisation, giving an overwhelming belief within the union that industrial change was necessary for an efficient competitive industry. Allen's approach leaves no room for disagreement between the government and the NCB who are seen as united in their view, and he gives little analysis of Labour's political agenda on modernisation.

Richards' study, which emerged from a PhD in response to the 1984-85 strike, considers the basis and the limits of solidarity and class consciousness amongst striking miners based on interviews with over two hundred miners.[46] Though primarily concerned with the later strike, it sheds some light on the 1972 dispute. Richards sees a collective, class-based identity amongst British miners, and argues that the obstacles to unity of the miners were severe, especially in times of industrial change. Solidarity was thus a fragile affair and was strongly localised, with the Areas retaining much autonomy following nationalisation. Both the localised identity of the Union, and its strength at pit level, acted as brakes on the development of a national union identity. Thus, any national leadership, whether militant or moderate, had to contend with the obduracy of Area traditions and, below these, the jealousy with which local interests and autonomy were guarded. Richards discusses the AIS productivity deal, which broke up the brief parity and national wage unity achieved under the NPLA, and which had underpinned the 1972 and 1974 strikes. He correctly sees this as a divide and rule tactic by Labour, that led to a divisive divergence in wages, broke up communities and undermined the union. Richards argues that the miners' conception of the union was as a defender of rights, security and dignity in a harsh working environment, and that in many localities it acquired a pastoral role. He notes that miners facing the closure of their local pit were nearly always isolated - pit closures in the post war period were generally implemented one by one, and

[46] Richards, *Miners on Strike*

that without a general threat of closure, the demise of a single pit was a rickety foundation on which to build any kind of collective resistance. Consequently pay, rather than closures, was a more tangible basis for solidarity, as something that affected everybody.

Ex-miner Rutledge's study developed from an article in *Marxism Today*.[47] It begins by noting the mid-1960s sociological distinction between the new "affluent" working class (e.g. Midlands car workers), who were contented, individualistic and non-militant, and the so-called "traditional" working class (e.g. the miners), who were considered class-conscious and militant *a la* Marx's model of the proletariat. The class consciousness of the latter was considered to derive from the close-knit working-class communities, often isolated from the rest of society. Since this type of society was recognised as declining due to social mobility and greater opportunities, it was believed that this foreshadowed a general reduction in class consciousness in Britain, and a diminution of socialist ideas among the working class. Rutledge takes issue with the sociologists' 'premature' view that the militant miner was an historical relic on the road to extinction. He references the wave of industrial unrest in the mining industry between 1969 and 1974, which inspired major acts of class solidarity from other groups of workers, and brought down the government. Rutledge, who witnessed this period of unrest as a working miner, argues that it represented both a heightening of class consciousness and a demonstration of mass militancy, in the sense of economic militancy on mass or industry wide scale as opposed to localised militancy. He attributes the re-emergence of miners as a vanguard group to the growth of a left-wing leadership within the NEC, the miners' own realisation of the decline in their earnings, and the rigidity of Tory wages policy set against the background of changes in the mode of production in the industry. In 1955, just eleven percent of total output was produced by power-loading, but by 1969 this had risen to ninety-two percent.[48] These changes called into question the old contract system of wages, based on piece work, and the need to move toward the NPLA. He notes that the piece-work system had served the old coal miners well, in that they only paid for what came out of the ground, but that the modern mechanised industry required a greater degree of co-operation and could

[47] Rutledge, 'Changes in the Mode of Production', pp.410-429
[48] Jackson, *The Price of Coal*, p.110

no longer risk minor stoppages jeopardising production as a whole. Rutledge notes that the NPLA led to an increase in the number of supervisors, which had been largely unnecessary under the piece-work system, and also that between 1947 and 1972 the number of pits in Britain fell by about seventy-five percent leading to the virtual elimination of some busy communities as miners left the industry or were obliged to migrate to other coalfields. He reasons that if the earlier sociological assumptions were correct, then this would have seriously weakened their 'traditional' social values, especially since most of the new mining communities which absorbed the migrating miners were in mixed, multi-industry localities. However, miners did not lose their fierce solidarity, class consciousness and radicalism, becoming if anything more militant. Rutledge argues that the destruction of the traditional mining communities may have played a part in the spread of mass militancy, since these communities in fact showed a certain narrow parochialism inconsistent with the development of real class consciousness. Migrating miners brought with them differing attitudes, forms of expression, union practices, forms of action, and political outlook, which served to break down the differences and traditional antagonisms between one mining region and another. This led increasingly to an outlook as a British miner rather than one loyal to a particular region.

McIlroy, Fishman and Campbell's edited work comprises a useful collection of articles on trade unions and industrial politics during this period, and is the second of two companion volumes, the other being a focus on the post-war compromise.[49] The first section concerns male manual workers, women in the labour market, and trade unions and immigration; the second, a survey mapping industrial politics; and the third, case studies covering trade unions' relationships with Labour, the Conservatives, the Communists and the Trotskyists, plus a study of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders dispute, and a focus specifically on 1972. Contributors include the editors, plus various historians, sociologists, industrial relations academics, and political scientists and commentators.

[49] McIlroy, et al, *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism*

### 1.9.5 The Rank-and-File Versus Bureaucracy Debate

The widespread use within the literature of references to the conflict between the rank-and-file and the leadership within the union, to the close relationship between the union and the Labour Party, and to the role played by trade unions in containing the anger and militancy of the membership, necessitates a brief consideration of these issues. There is a controversial historiography concerning the question of whether there are divergent interests between a union's full-time officials (FTOs) and the rank-and-file members, which is generally termed 'the rank-and-file versus bureaucracy' debate. This emerged from debates on the left, in particular from Marxism, and from Hyman's writings in the early 1970s in which he highlighted the way in which FTOs acquired interests that motivate them to channel union policies towards collaboration with employers and governments, leading to caution rather than risk-taking and concern for continuity and stability.[50] He later distanced himself from his erstwhile position, and there continues to be argument on the extent to which the opposition is a useful analytical tool.[51] In this there is some criticism for the implied binary opposition, because in many cases there is a more nuanced distinction between these 'opposites' with many grey areas, not least the role of shop stewards and also of FTOs below national level. There is also some criticism for seeing little distinction within the leadership, or within the ranks. The following two papers address aspects of these questions.

Darlington and Upchurch's article provides a critical reappraisal of Hyman's early analysis of the debate within trade unions from the perspective that he had previously held.[52] They defend Hyman's original position in arguing that the conflict of interest which exists between FTOs and rank-and-file members is a meaningful generalisation of a real contradiction within trade unionism. In the wake of Hyman's analysis, they note that other commentators also criticised the

[50] Hyman, R., 'Workers' control and revolutionary theory', *Socialist Register*, Vol.11, 1974, pp.241–78

[51] See Darlington & Upchurch, 'A reappraisal', pp.77-95; also the debate in *International Review of Social History*, Vol.34, No.1, 1989: Zeitlin, J, '"Rank and Filism" in British Labour History: A Critique', pp.42-61; Price, R, '"What's In a Name?", Workplace History and "Rank and Filism"', pp.62-77; Cronin, J.E., 'The "Rank and File" and The Social History of the Working Class', pp.78-88; Zeitlin, J, '"Rank and Filism" and Labour History: A Rejoinder to Price and Cronin', pp.89-102

[52] Darlington & Upchurch, 'A reappraisal', pp.77-95; The authors write from the International Socialists / Socialist Workers Party perspective previously held by Hyman

'rank-and-filist' perspective from a variety of viewpoints, arguing *inter alia* that there was no clear demarcation line between officialdom and the rank-and-file; that FTOs were responsive to their members; that left-wing officials had more in common with left-wing shop stewards than with their right-wing counterparts; and that FTOs did not necessarily tend towards conservatism or the members towards militancy.[53] What united all of these critiques was the view that the rank-and-file versus bureaucracy notion was insufficiently coherent or empirically grounded. In countering this position, Darlington and Upchurch stress that the emphasis placed by Hyman on the centrality of the bargaining function of FTOs to explain their moderate behaviour neglected or downplayed other important sociological and political factors within this model, such as their specific social role as intermediary and mediator between capital and labour, their substantial material benefits, and their political attachment to social democracy. Since the FTOs' 'mediators' role is dependent on the development of 'trust' between employers, government and individual union leaders, it is necessarily sometimes bought at the expense of workers' interests, with wage militancy, for example, suppressed in the 'national interest'. They note that FTOs are not simply 'fire extinguishers of the revolution', but perform a dual role of tying their members to the system, and also bringing home limited benefits within it. If FTOs failed to articulate their members' grievances or lead strike action that delivered at least some improvements, there would be a danger of losing support within the union. On the other hand, if they collaborated too closely with the employers / state, then the union officials' power would be totally undermined because the only reason they are taken seriously is that they represent social forces that pose the potential for resistance. Endorsement of militant action or taking the lead in recommending a strike might appear to be the most prudent course, but sometimes this can be part of an exercise in 'controlled militancy', whereby the officials lead the struggle to some extent, at least, in order to keep control over its main direction. The authors concede that it would be wrong to exaggerate the homogeneity of the 'rank-and-file', and also that one cannot assume a complete identity of interest between the minority of militant activists and the mass of members. They argue that it is the exploitative social relations at the heart of capitalist society that provides the material basis for collective workers' struggles which distinguish

[53] Kelly, J., *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, (London, 1988); McIlroy, J., *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, (Manchester, 1988); Fosh, P. & Heery, E., (Eds.), *Trade Unions and the Their Members: Studies in Union Democracy and Organisation*, (Basingstoke, 1990)

them from FTOs. It is this that makes the idea of the 'rank-and-file' a term not devoid of analytical use.

North's pamphlet argues that the modern working class and its organisations emerged within the context of the historical development of the nation state, and that trade unions' advances and prosperity were therefore largely dependent upon the industrial and commercial successes of their own national state.[54] He notes that many on the 'left' still insist that the socialist movement is duty bound to acknowledge the trade unions as the form of organisation most representative of the social interests of the working class, and to question this position is tantamount to sacrilege. In this they see criticism of the trade unions as opposition to the working class citing their mass working class membership. However, North argues, it does not automatically flow from the mass working class membership of the trade unions that these organisations act in its interests and one is compelled to examine whether there is, within the trade unions, an objective conflict between the interests of the mass membership and those of the governing bureaucracy, and the extent to which the policies of the unions reflect the interests of the latter, and not the former. He argues that in seeking to understand the essential nature of trade unions, the real question is, 'What is the relation of these organisations to the class struggle in general, and to the liberation of the workers from capitalist exploitation in particular?' To the extent that there is criticism on the 'left' towards trade unions it is largely seen as a problem of bad or inadequate leaders, though this, he believes, avoids the real issue - that the characteristics and qualities of the ruling bureaucracies, are the subjective manifestations of objective social properties and processes. He argues that trade unions are a definite social form, that is, a historically-evolved connection between people organised in classes and rooted in specific relations of production, and that there is a particular relationship between this form and its content. This is such that when a group of workers forms into a trade union, it acquires through that form new and distinct social properties to which the workers are inevitably subordinated. Trade unions represent workers as the seller of their labour power, and the essential purpose of the trade union is to secure the best price for this under prevailing market conditions. On the basis of capitalist production relations

[54] North, D., *Marxism and the Trade Unions*, (Sheffield, 1998). North is chair of both the International Committee of the Fourth International and the World Socialist Web Site

trade unions are, by their very nature, compelled to adopt a hostile attitude towards the class struggle, and, rather, are obliged to guarantee that their members supply their labour power in accordance with the terms of the negotiated contracts. Trade unions are thus organically opposed to the class struggle, and this opposition becomes all the more deadly at the point (such as during a strike) where it threatens the production relations of capitalism, that is, the socio-economic foundations of trade unionism itself.

# Chapter 2

## Background to the Strike

### 2.1 Introduction

The 1972 miner's strike was, in part, an outcome of the decline in demand for coal following an initial decade of expansion under the nationalised industry, which had been broadly welcomed by miners as an end to the exploitative and dangerous practices of the old mine-owners. Miners' early optimism turned increasingly to discontent as the downturn in demand during the second decade was marked by lower wage increases and job insecurity, which in turn created more militant attitudes. This chapter will assess the nature of the industry's contraction and the response to this by both the miners and the NUM leadership. It will begin by reviewing the nationalisation process and its financial implications, and the subsequent rationalisation and contraction of the industry as demand for coal rose and then declined. It will consider the modernisation and mechanisation of the coal industry, and the consequent need for the NCB to adapt wage bargaining arrangements by introducing a national day-wage system, which had the unforeseen effect of unifying the miners and their grievances. The chapter will address the relationships between the NUM and the NCB, and between the industry and government, and in particular the close relationship between the Labour Party and the NUM leadership. It will review the role played by the NUM in facilitating pit closures, and the miners' growing discontent that turned to militancy as they began to challenge the passive and collaborative approach of their leadership. The chapter will consider the way in which this militancy manifested in 'unofficial' national strikes in the two years preceding the 1972 strike, which served to ready the miners for the later strike.

## 2.2 Nationalisation

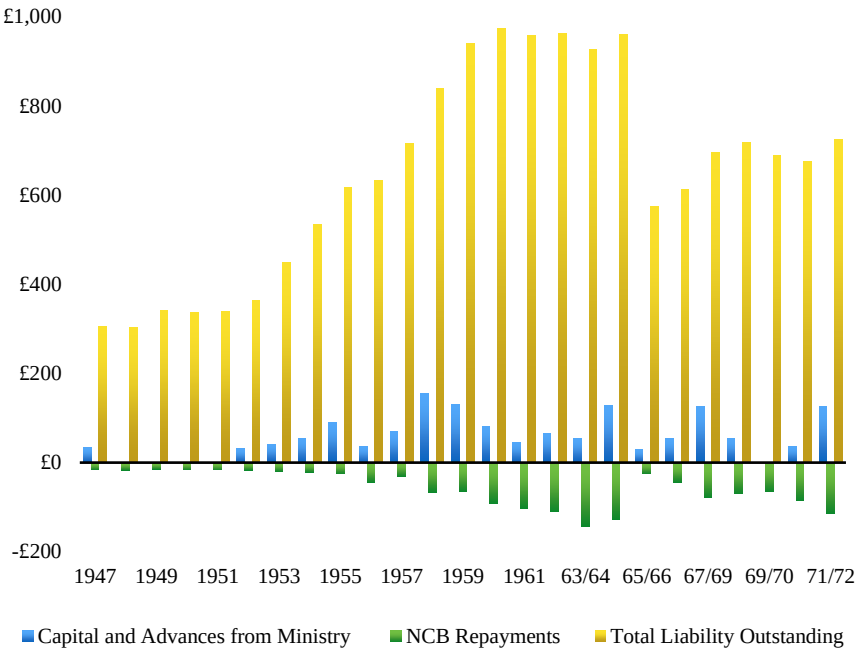
On 1 January 1947, Vesting Day for the nationalised industry, the NCB inherited nine hundred and fifty-eight collieries, plus subsidiary assets including houses, farmland, wharves, railway sidings, brick-works and coke ovens. All coal deposits had been previously nationalised under the Coal Act (1938) and were being administered by the Coal Commission; these too passed to the Board. The compensation paid to the previous owners was the outcome of protracted negotiations and comprised the above assets, plus capital outlay refunds, the Coal Commission's interest, additional overheads caused by severance, and additional compensation for the liabilities of the colliery companies which the NCB found expedient to take over. The decision to refund capital expenditure incurred prior to Vesting Day was designed to encourage such spending by the old mine-owners before nationalisation, though the assets subsequently claimed for had, in most cases, already been in use but the Board were obliged to bear the full cost without any allowance for depreciation. Compensation for the main colliery assets was set at £164.7 million, which was a 'global sum' for the industry as a whole and its division amongst the coalfield districts, and later among individual colliery companies, was determined by Valuation Boards appointed by the Government. Colliery companies received Government stock in satisfaction of their claims. The former owners of coal royalties dispossessed by the 1938 Act had received Coal Commission stock as compensation and the Treasury subsequently issued new stock in exchange to an initial value of £78.5 million. The overall compensation settlement to the previous owners came to around £394.4 million, and the Board became liable to the Government for the repayment of this capital with interest. These initial vested assets attracted interest at between two-and-a-half and four-and-a-half percent and were repayable as directed by the Minister of Power:

> repayments of long-term debts should be made over a period of 50 years in the form of "terminable annuities" - fixed annual payments of which the interest portion will decrease and the capital portion will increase year by year. Where compensation to the previous owners takes the form of Government Stock, the rate of interest payable by the Board will be the rate of interest which the stock bears. Where compensation is paid in cash by the Government, the rate of interest due from the Board will be the rate at which the Government borrow the money to make the payment. Where

money is advanced by the Minister to the Board, the interest is normally to be the gilt-edged interest rate at the time of borrowing.[1]

Subsequent advances to the Board were also initially made on the same basis, but in the mid-1950s these were replaced by advances with fifteen year or short term (circa two year) repayment arrangements.[2]

**Fig.2.1. NCB: Advances, Repayments and Liabilities, 1947-1972 (Millions).**[3]

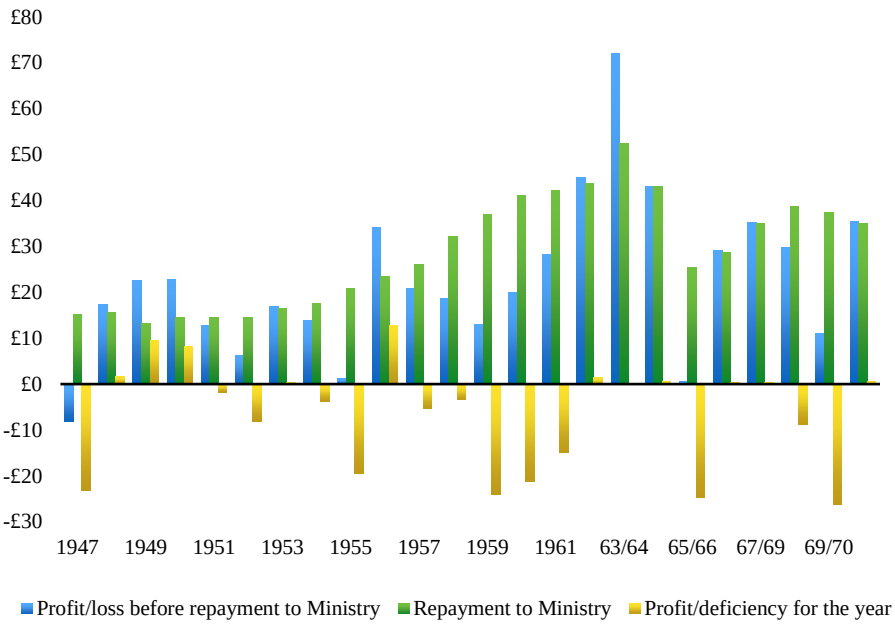



On top of the compensation paid to the previous owners, the NCB increasingly borrowed from the Government to fund the modernisation of the industry. Between nationalisation and the 1972 strike, the Board borrowed around £1.4 billion, and over this period it repaid some £1.3 billion, but still had an outstanding liability of around £724 million - despite £415 million of its 'burden of capital debt' having been written off by the Government under reconstruction of the industry following the National Plan (1965).[4] In simple terms, the Board's initial liability and its subsequent loans totalled *circa* £1.8 billion, whilst its repayments, write-off and outstanding liability totalled over £2.4 billion. Fig.2.1

[1] National Coal Board (NCB) Accounts, 1947, p.92
[2] NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72; Ashworth, W., *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol.5, 1946-1982: The Nationalised Industry*, (Oxford, 1986), Table 1.2
[3] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72. The Board's accountancy year end moved from 1 January to 31 March in 1964
[4] Fuel Policy (1965), p.14

shows the accumulation of the board's liability over time. This shows that whilst the NCB inherited a significant liability at nationalisation, most of its liability, and the more onerous portion, came in the period after nationalisation as it funded the increasing mechanisation of the industry. The Board achieved a profit in most years, but the subsequent repayment of interest and interim income due to the Government (irrespective of its loan repayments) converted these profits into losses or effective break-evens in the majority of years (see Fig.2.2).

**Fig.2.2. NCB: Profit/Loss and Repayments, 1947-1971 (Millions).**[5]




The Government required the Board to undertake activities in the public interest, some of which involved them making a loss; for example, some loss-making coalfields were kept in operation because the national interest required the coal to be produced. It also encouraged the Board to keep the price of coal artificially low in order to encourage growth in production of domestic and export markets, and to supply the nationalised industries with low cost fuel. The Board noted that:

> A commercial enterprise is bound to adapt its policy so as to make profits, but profits for their own sake cannot be an object of the Board's policy… The Board must seek every means of reducing costs not so as to produce profits but so as to benefit the community.

[5] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1970/71

The Board had an obligation to ensure that 'revenues were not less than sufficient to meet the outgoings properly chargeable to revenue account on an average of good and bad years', which was broadly taken to mean that it was not necessary to make a profit and Barratt-Brown argues that the Board could have charged marginal and not average rates and garnered an extra £1 per ton and so generated an additional £200 million per annum.[6] In the parliamentary debates on the coal industry during the strike several MPs pointed to the discrepancy between the 'pit-head' price for coal to industry and the price consumers paid, noting that consumers paid between £15 and £20 per ton whereas the average price achieved by the NCB was £5.84 per ton, with much of that sold to power stations for just £3 per ton. Members argued that since the NCB was obliged to sell coal at less than its market value, this impacted on its ability both to make a profit and to pay the miners a reasonable wage.[7]

### 2.3 Pit Closures

In the period between nationalisation and the 1972 strike the size of the industry contracted and the Board closed the majority of the collieries that it had inherited. These closures can broadly be divided into three phases: those closed under the rationalisation of the industry during the first decade whilst demand was high; those closed due to the decline in demand for coal in the second decade; and those closed under an advanced scheme of closure during the first Wilson Government as coal was deprioritised in favour of a multi-fuel economy. In the first decade after nationalisation the Board was keen to maintain, and even grow, the size of the workforce, but this changed when the demand for coal declined in the mid-1950s and it was obliged to make job cuts (see Fig.2.3). The first phase of closures followed the fact that many of the assets purchased from the previous owners were unwanted, a proportion of the pits were close to exhaustion, and a significant amount of the equipment was derelict. In the decade after nationalisation the Board rationalised these assets and closed some one hundred and fifty-eight uneconomic, exhausted and low productivity pits, and transferred the workforce to more economic neighbouring pits, whilst some new mines were also sunk. The

[6] NCB Accounts, 1946 & 1947; Barratt Brown, M., *What Really Happened to the Coal Industry? The background to the miners' strike*, (The Institute for Workers Control, Pamphlet no.31), (Nottinham, 1972), pp.5-6. 1 imperial ton = 1.01605 metric tonne

[7] HC Deb, 18 January, vol.829 c.266

Area most affected by closures in this period was South Western, which primarily constituted the Welsh coalfield, though all Areas were affected to some extent.

**Fig.2.3. Total Manpower and Collieries, 1947-1972.**[8]

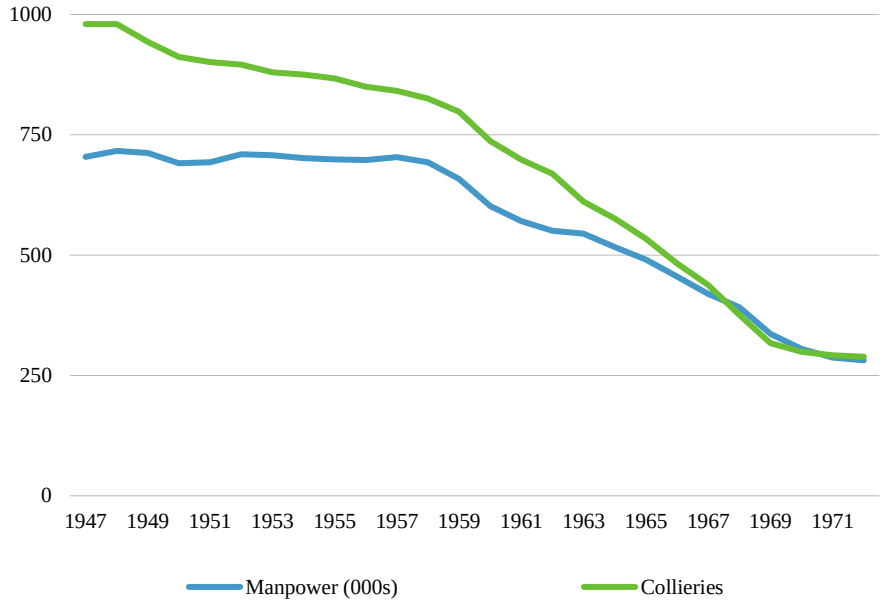
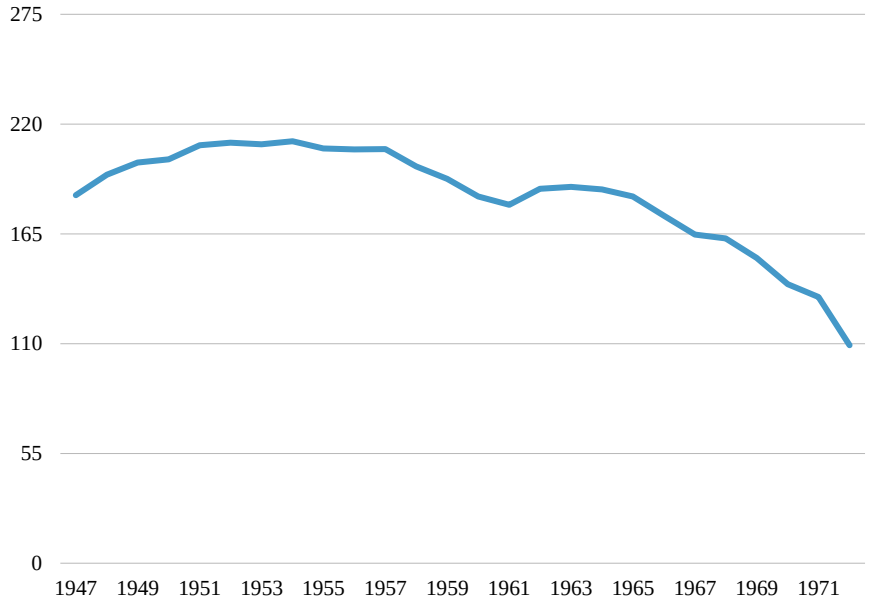


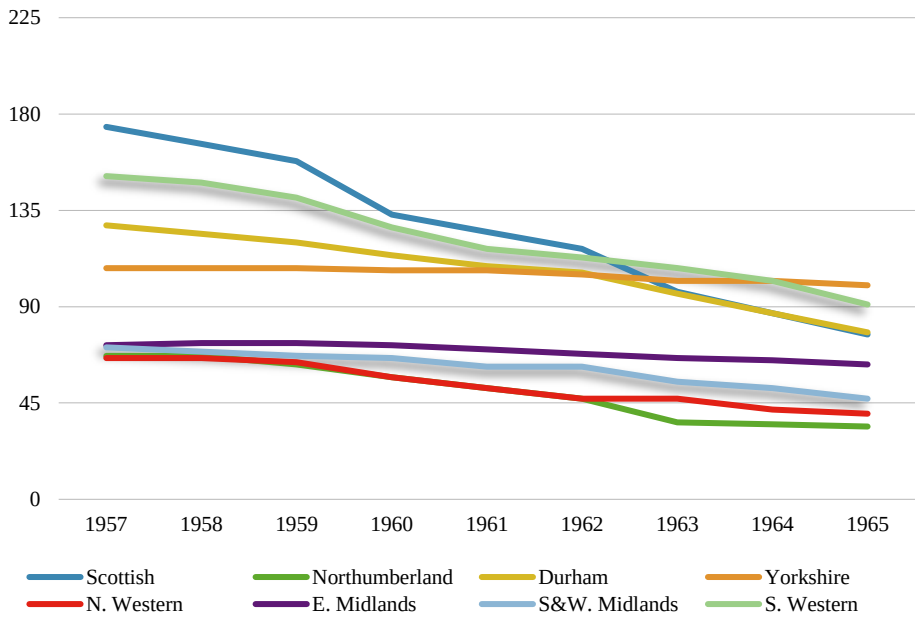

**Fig.2.4. Output of NCB Mines (Million tons).**[9]




[8] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72
[9] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72

The NCB's immediate priority in the decade after nationalisation was to maximise output, but the main constraint was the size of the workforce, which the Board had problems maintaining let alone increasing. In 1947-8 around twenty thousand 'Bevin boys', who had been conscripted into mining rather than the army during World War II, left the industry, and in addition the lifting of the Essential Work Order, which had prevented miners leaving the pits during the war years, saw the exit of around seventy-five thousand miners. Between 1947 and 1956 there was a shortage of energy and an excess demand for coal, which provided around ninety percent of the UK's energy requirements. Inland consumption peaked at two hundred and twenty-one million tons in 1956 after which large coal consumers, such as shipping and rail, moved increasingly away from coal as new technologies were introduced, and were soon lost forever, though power stations increased their consumption of coal. The Board's output fluctuated in the following period, but the trajectory was downward (see Fig.2.4). Coal's share of the UK's energy requirements dropped to eighty percent in 1957, to fifty-eight percent in 1966, to forty-seven percent in 1970, and was down to thirty-seven percent by 1973, whilst the share of the market for oil (coal's main competitor) rose from nineteen percent in 1958 to forty percent by 1973.[10]

**Fig.2.5. Active Collieries by Area, 1957-1965.**[11]




[10] O'Donnell, K., 'Pit Closures in the British Coal Industry: a comparison of the 1960s and 1980s', *International Review of Applied Economics*, Vol.2, No.1, 1988, pp.65-6

[11] Source: NCB Accounts, 1957-1965/66 (excludes Kent)

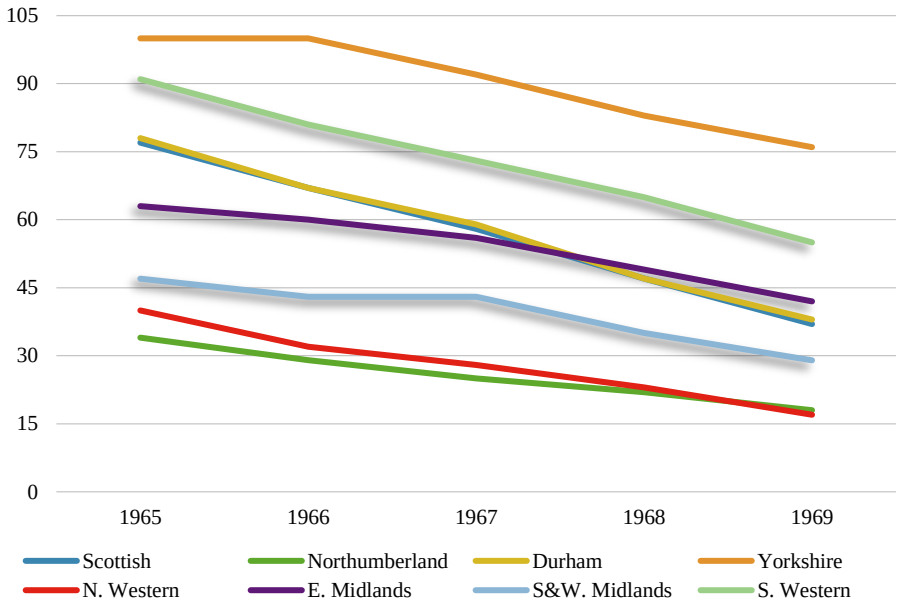
The emergence of cheap oil led to a decrease in the demand for coal and the NCB responded by closing two hundred and sixty-four pits between 1957 and 1963 with the loss of over two hundred thousand jobs (around thirty percent). Miners who had opportunities to leave the industry did so, and those who desired, or were forced, to remain in the industry were redeployed, though this was increasingly further afield and could be anywhere in the country. The closures in the second phase fell primarily on the peripheral coalfields and the remaining workforce was increasingly concentrated in the central coalfield Areas of Yorkshire and the East Midlands. The Scottish Area was most heavily affected in terms of the number of mines closed (see Fig.2.5), though in terms of job losses the worst hit Areas were South Western and Durham with sixty-seven thousand and fifty-two thousand jobs lost respectively. Over this period Yorkshire had an effective net loss of twenty seven percent of jobs (around half the national average) whilst East Midlands had just two percent.

The third phase of closures occurred during the first and second Wilson Governments, whose 1964 election manifesto had promoted modernisation and envisaged a co-ordinated policy for the major fuel industries, expansion programmes for the nationalised industries, and the removal of restrictions placed upon them.[12] Consequently, the incoming Labour Government was widely welcomed by miners though its National Plan (1965) and White Paper on Fuel Policy (1965) showed that the modernisation agenda actually implied a turn to more modern fuels, including nuclear power, and a relegation of the importance of coal. The White Papers noted that between 1960 and 1964 'six out of the eight coalfields made almost continuous losses *after the payment of interest*'. The central coalfield Areas were therefore, arguably, subsidising the peripheral Areas. The Government gave political commitments to protect coal as an indigenous industry, but not to the extent that it was uncompetitive or hampered the developing oil industry. It also noted that 'nuclear stations, once built, must be operated at the highest possible load factor to get the full economic benefit from them'. It therefore envisaged 'considerable loss of men' from the coal industry with funds to be provided to speed up pit closures, to assist with 'the human problems to which concentration gives rise' i.e. re-deployment and re-settlement, and towards a write-off of a portion of capital debt. Coal was to be given a five

[12] Labour Party Manifesto, *The New Britain*, 1964

percent preference of price over oil in government establishments, and the electricity generating industry was also to continue to give a preference for coal. However, the legislation heralded an accelerated closure programme (ACP) which signaled a relegation of coal in favour of oil, gas and nuclear power.[13] Two hundred and eighteen pits closed between 1965 and 1969, which affected all Areas including the central coalfield that had been largely unaffected by previous closures (see Fig.2.6).

**Fig.2.6. Active Collieries by Area, 1965-1969.**[14]




Many miners took opportunities to leave the industry until increasing unemployment closed these escape routes. More would have left if they had been able to, but stayed in the industry due to, for example, age or family commitments, and thus many who remained in the industry did so involuntarily and discontentedly, which was to have a marked effect on later militant attitudes. Those who left tended to be the younger and more physically fit and since there was almost no recruitment of youths, the average age of miners rose from forty-two in 1955 to forty-four in 1969, with miners in the age group 25-40 falling from thirty five percent in 1950 to twenty four percent by 1968. More miners left the

[13] The National Plan, (1965) Cmnd.2764; Fuel Policy (1965) Cmnd.2798. Emphasis added; TNA: POWE52/74, Report, Economic Development Committee to Wilson on the Accelerated Scheme, 19 October 1965; Berkovitch, I., *Coal on the Switchback: The Coal Industry since Nationalisation*, (London, 1977) pp.137-8

[14] Source: NCB Accounts, 1965/66-1968/69 (excludes Kent)

industry between 1960 and 1968 than remained, and this exodus was accompanied by an increasing rate of redundancy as the Board were no longer able to relocate those who wanted to remain. Redundancy rose from around three percent in 1966 to around twenty-two percent in 1967 and peaked in 1968 when over twenty-one thousand miners were declared redundant.[15]

## 2.4 Response to Pit Closures

In the first phase of closures, under the initial rationalisation of the industry, full employment was largely maintained and the closure process found no opposition from the NUM, whose president Will Lawther told Conference in 1947 that nationalisation meant: 'There are now no opposing sides in the industry.' Under the second phase of closures, NUM officials advocated continuity in this policy of cooperation with the NCB in support of the nationalised industry.[16] There was a strong belief that the nationalised industry was something to be defended and that industrial action was 'an offence against the ethos of nationalisation', an outlook that was increasingly exploited by the NUM leadership. The Conservatives were largely perceived as the natural adversary of the miners and of the NUM, but during the Conservative governments of the 1950s industrial action was discouraged by the Union, both from the point of view of defending nationalisation, but also because both Labour and NUM leaders promoted the idea that nothing should be done which might damage the electoral advance of Labour. Throughout this second period of closures, NUM officials argued that the only guarantee of stopping the decline and associated closures was to return a Labour government.[17] Pit closures were implemented one by one and the lack of a general threat meant that miners at a pit facing closure were effectively isolated. Since the closures affected different areas to different extents there was little chance of unified resistance. The issue of wages, which affected everybody, would ultimately become a more stable foundation for solidarity and collective resistance.[18] The NUM were broadly opposed to the rundown of the industry, in particular to the associated job losses, but the leadership had no intention of

[15] Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) pp.69-71 & 136
[16] Turner, R.L., 'Post War Pit Closures: The Politics of Deindustrialisation', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2, April–June 1985, pp.168-9
[17] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) pp.2 & 306
[18] Richards, A., *Miners on Strike: Class solidarity and division in Britain*, (Oxford, 1996) p.85

resisting the closures; they were opposed to assertive trade unionism, considered questions concerning the size of the industry outside their sphere of influence, and believed that political decisions should be left to politicians.[19] The NUM's role in respect of closures was ostensibly restricted to the alleviation of hardship as the process of closing a pit was complicated and potentially devastating for a community. However, the NUM's key role in the process was to facilitate the closures, which included demobilising any resistance that emerged. In June 1959, for example, there was a stay-down protest at Devon pit in Alloa, which was threatened with closure. The NCB promised to negotiate on condition that the protest ended, and the protesters were therefore persuaded to end the strike by local NUM leader Abe Moffat. The Devon pit subsequently closed.[20]

The third phase of closures under the ACP had a demoralising effect on miners since the de-prioritisation of coal implied an obsolete industry, though the ACP also gave an impetus to rank-and-file militancy and marked the beginning of resistance to closures despite the efforts of the NUM leadership to contain it. Catterall's thesis describes a number of pit closures in Lancashire under the ACP and explains how these were exploited by the North West Area NUM, of which Gormley was then president, arguing that the leadership were concerned primarily with attaining beneficial outcomes for the minority who remained in the industry and cared less about those forced to leave. At collieries threatened with closure the *modus operandi* of the leadership was to demand co-operation with the Board and extra effort from the miners in order to show that such collieries had a future. Catterall sees this as the familiar 'kiss of death' pretext to closure forcing miners to become pre-occupied in the 'fight' to save their pits, which dissipated any challenge to the NUM leadership. The ACP was thus sold to the miners on the basis of the need to accept Labour's modernisation agenda because of the new realities facing the contracting industry. This 'new realism' promoted a common goal in the coalfield for Labour, the NUM, and the miners to work together to prove that coal could compete in a free market, though its effect was to undermine rank-and-file solidarity. The tactic of encouraging miners to work harder to save a doomed pit, Catterall argues, was part of a strategy of collaboration to smooth the closure process and 'facilitated the

[19] Turner, 'Post War Pit Closures', pp.169-70
[20] Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005), p.7

manipulation of "survivalist" mentalities'.[21] New realists essentially argued that capitalism had fundamentally changed and they sought to replace class struggle with consensus politics.[22] The attitude of the NUM leadership also turned the minds of miners away from protest by reinforcing the view that the industry did not have a future, and so encouraging miners to find alternative work and to look after themselves, with the NUM therefore effectively promoting individualism.[23] This chimed with the legislative manoeuvres of both Labour and Conservative governments, which promoted individualism as a means of undermining the strength of unions (see Chapter Ten). Most miners were unwilling to abandon their historic relationship with Labour and felt that it remained the party of the working-class. This was a crucial factor in preventing an abiding cleavage developing between the NUM and Labour.[24] However there was widespread discontent amongst miners both with Labour and the pit closure programme during its tenure, and many later felt betrayed:

> I'd look on the Labour Party, if elected, as our government but I wouldn't be prepared to tolerate the treatment we had last time, we wouldn't get caught twice.
>
> We tolerated a lot under the Labour government that we wouldn't have under a Tory government.
>
> What delayed the strike in my opinion was the blind loyalty that we had to the Labour government.
>
> We were too fair to the Labour Party, I am a Labour man mind, but we were too fair to the Labour government, especially that [Minister of Power, Richard] Marsh... all he could spout was atomic power.
>
> The awareness of the working class to the lack of difference between the Tories and Labour in regard to the miners' struggle was such that people were saying, "What's the alternative?"[25]

[21] Catterall, S.J., *The Lancashire Coalfield, 1945-1972: The Politics of Industrial Change*, DPhil Thesis, University of York, 2001, pp. 300-4, 324, 335-6 & 444
[22] Watters, F., *Being Frank: The Memoirs of Frank Watters*, (Doncaster, 1992) p.61
[23] Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p.65
[24] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.98
[25] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, 'The Miners' Strike, 1972: Report and initial history', Morgan, A., South Wales Coalfield History Project, Swansea University (Miners' Strike), Appendix II, Interviews with Members of Dulais Valley Strike Committee (SC) (Dulais), Swansea Steam SC (Swansea Steam), Ammanford and Gwendraeth SC (Ammanford & Gwendraeth), and Emlyn Williams, vice-president South Wales NUM

These quotes, which resulted from oral history interviews taken immediately after the strike, reflect a discontent with the Wilson Government's betrayal of miners' interests that had fed into and fueled calls for industrial action. These views were to have a profound affect both on the miners' relationship with the Labour Party and with the NUM leadership that had defended and supported the Government.

## 2.5 Restructuring of the Wage System

The closure of the majority of the collieries in the peripheral coalfield Areas led to the concentration of the labour force on the more productive central coalfield Areas (see Fig.2.7). This, combined with an increase in mechanisation, caused a sharp uplift in productivity, which rose from twenty-five hundredweight per man shift in 1957 to forty-four hundredweight in 1971, a seventy-six percent increase. At nationalisation just two-and-a-half percent of total output was produced by machines, which cut and loaded coal onto conveyors (known as mechanised production or power-loading), but by 1957 this had risen to twenty-three percent and by 1962 it was fifty-nine percent (see Fig.2.8).[26] The rise in productivity faltered in 1969, and in early December Ezra announced that there was 'not enough coal to meet requirements', due largely to a failure to meet productivity targets. Whilst the NCB was working to a target of 9.6%, they had achieved only 2.3%. Ezra put this down to mechanisation running into trouble on deeper and more inaccessible seams, and to a fall in the morale of miners.[27] The existing contract system was incompatible with an increasingly mechanised industry that required a greater degree of co-operation and the elimination of minor stoppages which jeopardised production,[28] and so, in the period between nationalisation and 1955, the Board moved towards establishing a national wage structure for the industry, though it faced significant problems in doing so. The move toward a wage structure for miners to be paid on a day-wage rather than the previous piece-rate, required the rationalisation of some six thousand five hundred local names for jobs in the industry; these were first classified under four hundred job

[26] NCB Accounts, 1965/66-1971/72. One hundredweight (cwt) = 50.8 kg

[27] Conservative Party Archives (CPA): Conservative Research Department (CRD)/B/15/1, Fuel & Power Committee briefs (FPC), (70)3, Ezra 2 December 1969 cited in briefing paper on Coal Industry Bill (1970), 6 April 1970

[28] Rutledge, I, 'Changes in the Mode of Production and the Growth of "Mass Militancy" in the British Mining Industry, 1954-1974', *Science and Society*, Vol.41, No.4, Winter 1977-78, pp.415-6

descriptions, and then placed into thirteen grades - five for underground workers, five for surface workers, and three for craftsmen. This new structure came into operation on 4 April 1955 for about four hundred and six thousand daywagemen.[29]

**Fig.2.7. Comparison of Collieries in Peripheral and Central Areas, 1947-72.**[30]

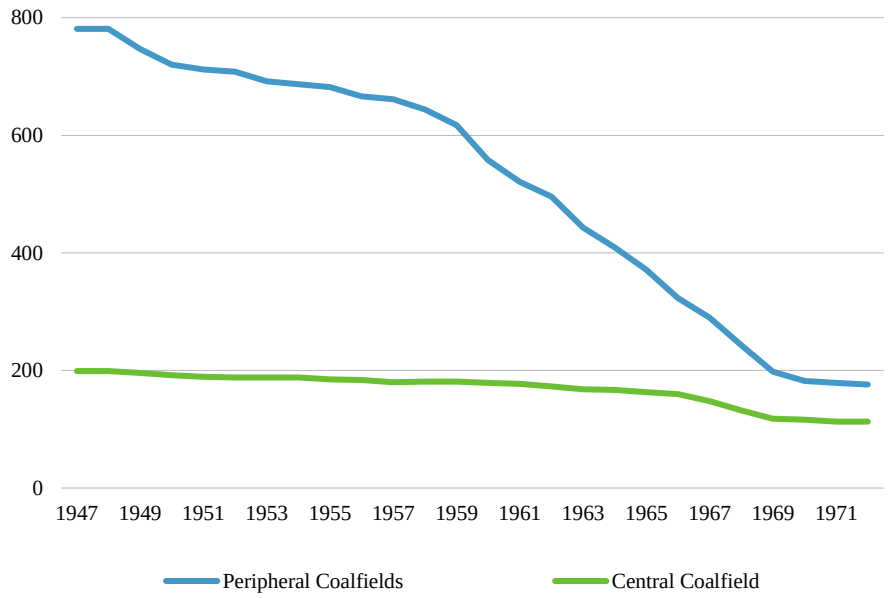
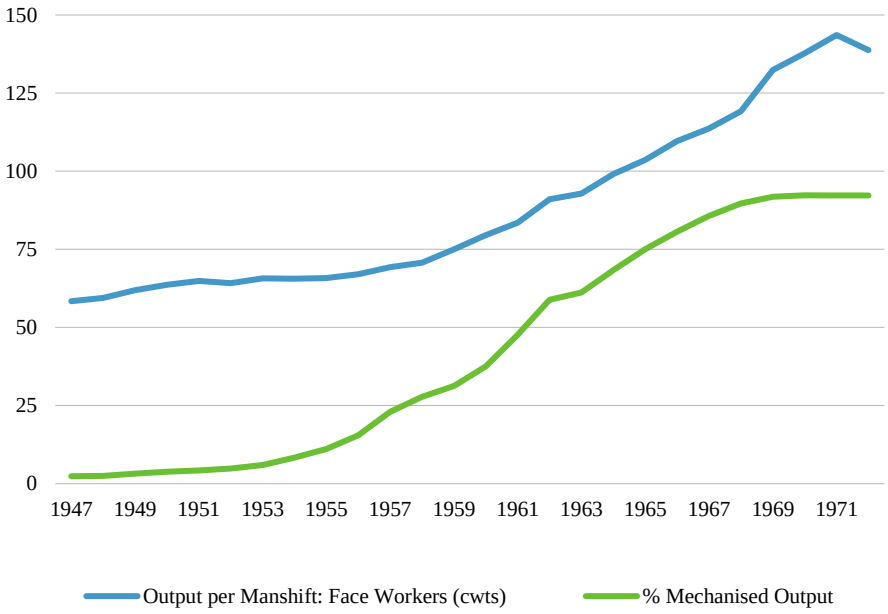



**Fig.2.8. Mechanisation and Productivity, 1947-72.**[31]




[29] Compound terms, such as daywagemen, pumpsmen, are used in the Thesis where these terms are common in the sources

[30] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72

[31] Source: NCB Accounts, 1947-1971/72

The Board considered this to be a great step forward in providing the industry with a coherent wage system instead of the haphazard and complicated arrangements that had existed previously. At this time, there were also about eight thousand weekly paid industrial staff (WPIS) in the industry. Many in this category were surface foremen but it also included assistant colliery engineers, colliery training and safety officers, and rescue brigade staff. Their wages and conditions of service were negotiated separately from those of mineworkers whom, in the main, they supervised.[32] Over the following period the Board moved towards wage parity for those who worked on mechanised coal faces across the industry with the introduction of a National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) by simplifying the various grades and job titles into essentially one job - power loader. This gave the Board greater control over wage costs and the production process, and this greater flexibility had disciplinary overtones as the NPLA could be used to move miners to less favourable tasks rate should management deem such a move necessary for production. The NUM leadership saw the NPLA as a means of taking power away from the Areas to the national centre, and of keeping the Union together by slowing the rate of closures in high-cost peripheral pits by subsidising their wages from the more economically viable, low-cost central pits. They hoped this would preserve mining communities, keep the maximum number of jobs, and maintain the membership of the NUM.[33]

On 6 June 1966 the NCB and the NUM signed the NPLA for one hundred thousand workers on power-loaded coal faces. This established standard shift rates for power-loading teams on all new mechanised faces, except in Scotland and Durham where all mechanised faces came under the agreement. Initially there was a separate standard shift rate in each Area, but the intention was to introduce a uniform national shift rate for power-loading teams by the end of 1971, such that eventually a power-loader's wage would be the same wherever he worked in the country.[34] Both the NUM and NCB believed that the NPLA would reduce pit-level conflict and improve industrial relations, which in turn would increase productivity and make the industry more competitive.[35] Miners in the central coalfield were largely net losers due to wider coal seams there making coal easier to extract, which had given them higher than average wages under the old piece-

[32] NCB Accounts, 1956, p.68-72
[33] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.49-50, 86-8 & 204
[34] NCB Accounts, 1966-67, p.36
[35] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.18

work system, and therefore smaller increases going forward as the lower paid Areas caught up. NCB Chairman Derek Ezra acknowledged that Nottinghamshire miners were 'particularly sore' because of this parity issue.[36] In June 1971 the NCB and the NUM finalised the third national day-wage structure, under which the remaining fifty thousand piece-workers and task-workers were brought within the national wage structure. This was the last instalment of the wage rationalisation process begun in 1955.[37]

The piece-work system had previously negated the need for overseers since miners were responsible for their own rate of work and were paid for what they produced. Under the NPLA deputies and overmen took on the role of 'foremen' and the number of these under-officials increased at a time when the number of miners was decreasing, which aggravated the growing discontent amongst mineworkers. In 1966-7 there was approximately one under-official per five face-men but by 1970-71 the ratio was one to four. The NPLA led to a marked fall in local disputes but an increase in job control disputes particularly where supervisors sought to maximise machine utilisation, which caused friction with power-loading teams who had no incentive to do more than the standard task. Under-officials were organised in NACODS and miners' discontent was worsened by the failure of NACODS members to support the miners in the 1972 strike, though their pay was determined as a percentage above the miners' rate.[38] The NPLA made wage-bargaining easier by removing grade and pit level negotiations and putting the NUM leadership in control of negotiating on behalf of all miners. This strengthened its hand on the national stage. However, neither the NUM nor the Board anticipated how wage determination under the agreement would become a means of unifying the miners themselves. South Wales miner Haydn Matthews drew attention to this effect:

> This became a unifying sort of thing then, the NPLA. It unified coalfield and coalfield, pit and pit. But it also unified the day wage men along with the piece-workers then. We were arguing for the first time ever as a coalfield with one voice. We were shouting the same thing.[39]

[36] London School of Economics (LSE): Hetherington/19/25, Points from a discussion with Derek Ezra (Ezra), 27 January 1972, p.2
[37] NCB Accounts, 1971/72, p.36
[38] Rutledge, 'Changes in the Mode of Production', p.419; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, pp.23-4; Barratt Brown, *What Really Happened*, p.19
[39] LB: MS 4000/2/152/2, Plan for a book, MkI, 'The Battle of Saltley Gate', 1975 (SaltleyI), p.7, Haydn Matthews, Maerdy Colliery, South Wales

There were in fact a number of unforeseen consequences of the NPLA. It had the effect of equalising pay, but in doing so it 'nationalised dissatisfaction' over low wages, and also reduced unofficial conflict whilst making official conflict more likely since small scale pit level unrest proved to have been a valuable safety valve for industrial unrest.[40] Miner Jock Kane noted that by removing power from branch level, the national leadership were initially able to use the NPLA as a way of heading off strike action, though this meant that it built up with no outlet:

> "Now," they used to tell the colliers if they had a dispute after the NPLA, "it'll have to go to national level, you see. We've got the NPLA. What's the good of striking? The manager can't do anything about it even if he wanted to - it's got to go to national level… But you carry on working meantime."[41]

Kane's comment points to the increasingly widespread belief that the NUM worked with the Board to head off strike action and encourage passivity amongst the miners. The NUM leadership were distrusted for collaborating with the NCB in the contraction of the industry, and for promoting the idea that the only way to stop further closures was to keep wages low and refrain from industrial action since militant resistance would merely speed up the process.[42] Matthews observed that industrial action would have come years earlier but for the threat that they received from the leadership: '"You strike and you lose your pit, you lose your jobs!" And this created a hell of a lot of doubt in the minds of the men in the pits. They used this weapon until they wore the record out.'[43] Miners feared that industrial action would lead to pit closures but increasingly realised that pits were being closed anyway, and therefore they may as well get the best out of it whilst they could. Wage levels also had a bearing on redundancy payments and it was therefore in miners' interest to get paid more even if they lost their job.[44] South Wales NUM president, Glyn Williams, conceded that the miners' passivity did not in fact stop the closures: 'Well, all right, we've been very moderate in our demands because of the possible social consequences of pit closures, but that didn't stop pit closures.'[45] The growing militancy amongst the miners led to the emergence of left-wing and militant leaders, and as the authority of the official

[40] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.50, 86-8 & 204
[41] Kane, J., Parker, C., & Kane B., *No Wonder We Were Rebels, The Kane Story: An Oral History*, (Armthorpe Branch NUM, 1994) pp.50-1
[42] Taylor, R., *The Fifth Estate: Britain's Unions in the Seventies*, revised edn. (London, 1980) p.359
[43] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, pp.1-2, Haydn Mathews
[44] McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) p.193
[45] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.14, Interview, Glyn Williams, president South Wales NUM

leadership declined that of the unofficial leadership increased.[46] The election of Daly as NUM general secretary in 1968 coincided with the emergence of left-wingers Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones to the leadership of two of Britain's biggest unions, though this new layer of left leaders were not the cause of the increased militancy of the period but rather an outcome of it. Barnes and Reid observed that union officers were aware of the growing dissatisfaction amongst the membership and were increasingly under attack from activists and militants and were therefore moving politically to the left and towards greater industrial militancy. McCormick too noted that the leadership was propelled into taking control of a groundswell of militancy which threatened to engulf it.[47]

## 2.6 Unofficial National Strikes

There remained some debate within the NUM between those who felt that any sort of industrial action would lead to further contraction and job losses, and those who felt that they must make a stand against low wages and job insecurity and that it would be better to have a smaller industry that paid better wages, than carry on under the prevailing conditions. The growing discontent over wage levels and job insecurity, and the increasing unity deriving from both the NPLA and widespread colliery closures, led to two unofficial national strikes in 1969 and 1970. Yorkshire had been one of the better paid Areas until the NPLA when the wages of the higher paid Areas were held back to allow others to catch up, and Taylor argues that the combination of the ACP and restricted wages caused growing discontent, which overcame the more moderate tendencies in Yorkshire making its militancy all the more explosive.[48] The 1969 strike was primarily concerned with the reduction of surface-men's hours, but began at Cadeby Main colliery in South Yorkshire over the issue of payments to 'market-men' - fully trained face-workers who covered for absentees, but were paid the full rate for their job even if they were transferred to a pit with a lower NPLA rate; a practice increasingly called into question by management in a cost-cutting environment. Cadeby had around two hundred men without a 'face' job following its merger

[46] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.205
[47] Dorfman, G.A., *Government versus Trade Unionism in British Politics since 1968*, (London, 1979) p.15; Barnes, D. & Reid, E., *Governments and Trade Unions: The British Experience, 1964-79*, (London, 1980) p.97; McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.189
[48] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.205

with Denaby colliery. The South Yorkshire Panel of the NUM refused to back the strike, awaiting the outcome of negotiations with the NCB, but the Area pits began to drift out from the end of September. A motion for strike action was carried by eighty-five votes to three in Yorkshire and by 14 October all the Area's pits were on strike and pressure grew for action from other Areas. In South Wales a strike resolution was defeated, but sixteen thousand miners came out on strike along with miners from pits in the Midlands and Scotland. At its peak around one hundred and thirty thousand miners from one hundred and forty pits were out across Britain. The 1969 strike was the first since 1926 to cross the boundaries of a coalfield, and in the second week of the strike Yorkshire miners crossed the Pennines to picket the Lancashire coalfield. On 17 October the NCB made a revised wage offer and Daly recommended acceptance and a return to work. The Derbyshire Area responded by passing a vote of no confidence in the leadership, and in Yorkshire there were demands for Daly and Ford to resign. Yorkshire voted to reject the offer and one hundred and twenty-eight pits were still out on strike on 20 October, but miners began to drift back to work.[49] The discontent amongst miners continued to grow and the NUM conference the following July called for industrial action if the Board rejected the miner's wage demands. The Composite resolution on wages was moved by left wingers McGahey and Scargill, who argued that a failure to adopt the resolution:

> will release an anger that will make last October look like a Sunday School picnic. No longer will our membership accept that a small increase is better than none. They are fed up with being asked not to rock the boat. They have been told to remain passive and what has that got us? Half the coal-mining industry has been obliterated.

No delegate spoke against the resolution, which was passed by one hundred and sixty-nine votes to one hundred and sixty though some criticised its implicit support for industrial action. Henry Daley, delegate from Yorkshire, warned:

> I think it is better that the NEC should organise such action rather than we have a break-out again by the branch officials such as myself supported by the rank and file. The mood is already there. Catch hold of it, if you will. Ignore it at your peril.[50]

[49] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.180-1 & 191; McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, pp.190-4; Darlington, R. & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain, 1972*, (London, 2001) pp.34-5; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, pp.28-33

[50] NUM Conference Report, 1970, pp.138 & 154-60; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.36

In September 1970 the Board made a reduced offer against the NUM's claim. The NEC rejected the offer but, following the experience of the previous year, agreed to ballot members on strike action, which resulted in a 55.5% majority in favour of a strike, but nevertheless short of the two thirds majority required under Rule 43 of the NUM's rulebook. The largest votes came from peripheral left-wing Areas, South Wales (eighty-two percent) and Scotland (seventy-seven percent), and when the NEC voted thirteen to eleven to accept the Board's offer the Scottish Area rejected the decision, and there were strike calls from South Wales. On 30 October pits in Doncaster came out on strike despite an Area Council vote against such action. The strike spread to pits in South Wales, Scotland and Yorkshire, and peaked on 10 November with one hundred and sixteen pits out (including collieries in Kent, Durham, Derbyshire and Staffordshire). Around one hundred thousand miners were on strike at some point over the four weeks. Daly called for a return to work emphasising the need to follow the rulebook and was shouted down by angry miners when he visited Doncaster. A subsequent pit-head ballot accepted the Board's offer by a margin of two to one, though the more militant Areas voted against. Following the failure of the 55.5% majority vote to secure an official strike the Derbyshire Area proposed that Rule 43 should be altered to enable a strike to be called on the basis of a simple majority, and this subsequently became a key issue at the NUM's 1971 conference.[51]

## 2.7 Conclusion

The chapter showed that the liabilities with which the NCB began life increased as the Board undertook essential modernisation funded with government loans. The decline in the demand for coal in the second decade after nationalisation led to the contraction of the industry and encouraged further mechanisation, which in turn required further investment, and though productivity rose it was extracted from a decreasing pool of collieries and men. The price of coal was required by government to be low to aid the industry's main industrial consumers, and both the Board and the government preferred to keep wages low in order to keep the price of coal at competitive levels. In this they were aided by the NUM leadership,

[51] *Financial Times*, 24 October 1970; McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, pp.194-6; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.35; Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p.163

which consistently argued that higher wages would lead to a further contraction of the industry. The interests of the miners, conversely, were in achieving a reasonable living wage and job security though not necessarily in the coal industry if alternatives were readily available, which in many places they were not. The NUM historically sought to push wages up whilst maintaining competitive levels, and to maintain the size of the industry where possible. However, if the industry determined that collieries must close and jobs must go, then it was the leadership's role to convey this to the members and make the process as smooth and compliant as possible, i.e. without any fuss or resort to strike action; essentially to maintain a compliant workforce in the face of a contracting industry. The leadership, at both national and Area level, played a consistent role in manoeuvring to contain discontent: in appeals to defend the nationalised industry; in the need to return a Labour Government; in claiming that militancy would lead to more closures; in appeals to 'new realism'; and in encouraging the miners to work harder to save the pit. The Wilson Government's relegation of coal and its introduction of the ACP led to growing discontent amongst miners and anger towards both the Labour Party and the NUM leadership, which supported Labour's position. The introduction of a national day-wage system and the NPLA had a transformative effect; in unifying miners nationally with regard to wage-bargaining, in bringing discontent into regions where it had not previously manifested through the holding back of wage levels, and in bottling up discontent where it had previously had an outlet. The coal industry historically had been beset by numerous small-scale strikes over conditions and wages, but these were largely confined to individual pits or to particular grades and trades within a pit. It was not until the end of the 1960s, following the combined effects of the ACP and the NPLA, that miners' frustration and anger spilled on to the national stage. This anger emerged from the ranks and was not directed by the NUM leadership, who rather sought to contain it. The ensuing unofficial strikes in 1969 and 1970 had the effect of preparing the miners for the following year's dispute.

# Chapter 3

## Prelude: From Conference to Strike

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the wage claim that emerged from the 1971 NUM conference, its rejection by the Board, and the imposition of a ban on overtime including the establishment of liaison committees as the miners prepared for the strike. It will initially review the conference resolutions that, firstly, set the level of the wage claim and resolved to take industrial action if the claim were rejected, and secondly, lowered the threshold for strike action to fifty-five percent from the previous two thirds majority, a hurdle that had made the 1970 strike 'unofficial'. The resolution for lowering the threshold was proposed by the more militant Areas, who were frustrated by the unofficial strikes in the previous two years, and was resisted by the more conservative Areas and by the NEC. The subsequent vote for industrial action cleared the lower threshold and this chapter will review the vote and the interpretations of its implications including the Cabinet's view that it was a close result and a sign of division amongst the miners; this would subsequently give it a confidence that was misplaced and informed its negotiating strategy in which it believed that both control and time were on its side. The chapter will assess the overtime ban that was implemented as negotiations broke down and served to prepare the miners for the subsequent strike ballot and the strike itself. The ban decreased the coal stocks and demonstrated to miners how low their wages were without the addition of overtime pay, which many had become used to getting. It also introduced liaison committees, which became strike committees and were responsible for the organisation of picketing and the oversight of safety and maintenance work during the dispute. The chapter will review the operation of the liaison

committees via case studies of Cronton colliery, Lancashire and of the collieries in Abertillery district, Monmouthshire.

### 3.2 Higher Wages, Pit Closures

Miners had consistently been told that to go on strike was to hasten the contraction of the industry, and both the NCB and the NUM had used this argument successfully to ensure the miners' cooperation and compliance during the period of rundown under the ACP. Since their restraint had not in fact stopped the pit closures, miners' frustration and anger fed into an increasing militancy and a belief that they should appeal for higher wages even if this meant further pit closures; their demand effectively became 'then let them close, but let the men working in those remaining earn a decent wage'.[1] Taylor claims that he heard miners say, on numerous occasions, that if the industry could not pay decent wages then the pits should be closed.[2] In the Commons debate during the strike Sir Anthony Meyer noted that: 'There is a rather curious conjunction of very radical elements in the union and extreme right-wing economists arguing that the beneficial effect of the strike is that it will result in a sudden and massive closure programme such as no democratic Government could embark upon.'[3] He perhaps had in mind an article in *The Economist*, published on the eve of the strike, which was seemingly unaware of the conscious choice taken by the miners in its warning that a long strike would inevitably close more pits and that they 'will have brought the closures wholly on themselves.'[4] A similar sentiment was given towards the end of the strike by Heath's economic advisor, Brian Reading, who issued an internal memo, which set out the employers' argument, essentially:

> Mining is an unpleasant and dangerous and so to persuade anyone to do such a job you need to pay them above average rewards. But who wants to persuade them because the market does not, as it is easier and cheaper to use alternate fuels. What logic is there in the Government subsidising the miners to do a job which they don't want to do and no-one else wants them to do? We should therefore make them choose between higher wages for the few or lower wages for the many.[5]

[1] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.19
[2] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.217
[3] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.315
[4] *The Economist*, 8 January 1972
[5] TNA: PREM15/985, Memo, Reading to Armstrong, 17 February 1972

Reading's reasoning assumed that miners were demanding higher wages and no redundancies, and whilst this was arguably their ideal position, they were largely resigned to job losses in a contracting industry, but often had little alternative employment in their locality. Miners had effectively made the choice set out by Reading, and the Cabinet were already aware of their preference prior to his memo, since Carr had reported on 27 January that: 'Some miners therefore argued that they would prefer additional collieries to be closed and the industry to be further contracted, but more highly paid, than to continue as at present.'[6] Miners were in fact reacting to the Government's continuation of the previous decade's strategy of restraining wage rises whilst the industry contracted. Both were aware that the industry would continue to contract, the choice therefore was over the wage levels of those that remained in the industry.

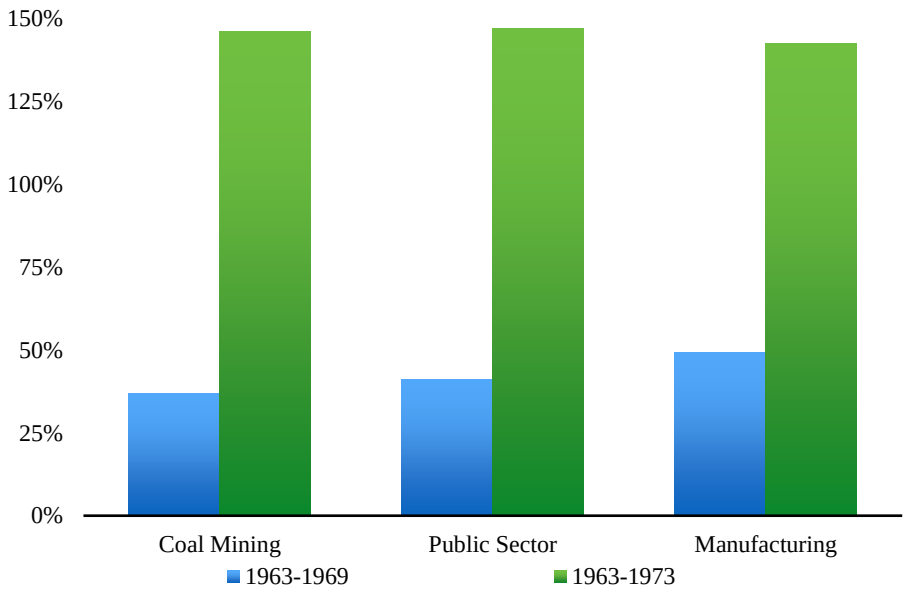
### 3.3 NUM Annual Conference 1971

Miners' frustration over low wages and steady job losses had created a growing mood of militancy, and NUM vice-president Sidney Schofield made this point directly to Carr during the dispute in noting that discontent had been building up over years and that the strike would have taken place even under a Labour Government.[7] The NUM therefore met for its annual conference in July 1971 under conditions where the growing anger of the membership was tangible with delegates knowing that there was an expectation that something must be done about wage levels.[8] The demand for a wage increase was proposed as a Composite of resolutions by the main participants in the two unofficial strikes, namely Yorkshire, which had become increasingly militant in the period following the introduction of the NPLA, and Scotland and South Wales, which were CP-led and historically militant. Conference agreed to claim increases in minimum wages from £30 to £35 per week for face-workers (16.7%), from £19 to £28 for other underground workers (47.4%), and from £18 to £26 for surface workers (44.4%).[9] The wage claim was presented on the basis of what were considered reasonable wages, rather than in percentage terms, and followed a period of

[6] TNA: CAB128/50/5, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 27 January 1972
[7] TNA: PREM15/984, Notes of a meeting, Carr & NUM, 21 January 1972
[8] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) p.110
[9] Wilberforce Inquiry, Cmnd. 4903, February 1972 ('Wilberforce'), p.1

relatively low increases for many since the introduction of the NPLA had held back wage increases generally. Godley has shown that the wage increase for miners over the period 1963-1969 lagged behind both the manufacturing sector and the public sector generally, and that the wage increase won during the 1972 strike had the effect of equalising this discrepancy over the period 1963-1973 (see Fig.3.1). Wage increases for miners lagged behind those in the manufacturing sector during the previous decade also (see Fig.3.2), which had the effect of allowing manufacturing wages to close the gap on miners' wages. Miners still held an advantage in 1963 with average weekly wages for men over twenty-one at £18 15s 0d for miners and £17 5s 9d in the manufacturing sector, though it was the narrowing of the differential that allowed frustration to build amongst miners.

**Fig.3.1. Comparison of Wage Increases: Coal Mining, Public Sector & Manufacturing, 1963-69 & 1963-73.**[10]

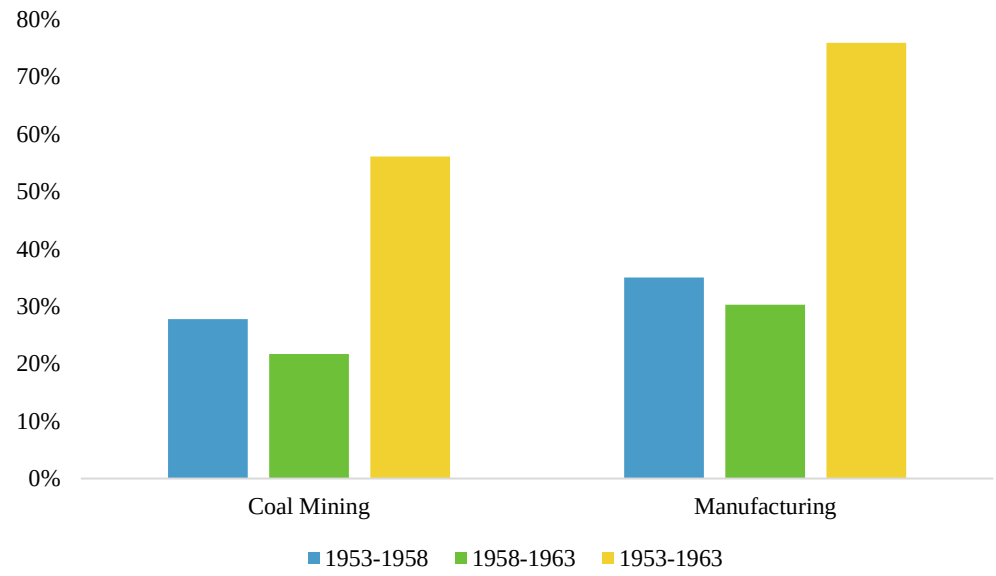



The final section of the Composite resolution called for members to be consulted on 'various forms' of industrial action in the event of a rejection of the wage claim by the NCB, reflecting the unease within the NEC at the visibility of strike action.[11] Wallace Sykes, who moved the Yorkshire element of the resolution, warned delegates to take heed of the growing militancy amongst the members

[10] Source: Godley, W.A.H., 'Inflation in the United Kingdom', Table 3, in Krause, L.B. & Salant, W.S., *Worldwide Inflation: Theory and Recent Experience*, (Washington DC, 1977) p.469
[11] Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.51

following the previous year's unofficial strike: 'we nearly saw a position… where the tail was wagging the dog… this disenchantment has grown. It has grown double-fold since then.'[12] Allen argues that at that time officials who had generally advised caution and compromise in the 1960s were now raising their hands with the militants, not because they had changed their political spots, but because they were having to be sensitive about the mood of their members.[13]

**Fig.3.2. Comparison of Wage Increases: Coal Mining & Manufacturing, 1953-58, 1958-1963 & 1953-63.[14]**




The conference resolution on wages was based, in part, on what appeared to be better prospects for the future of industry as the NCB's 1970-71 annual report had stated:

> The immediate and longer term prospects of the coal industry are now brighter than they have been since 1957. During the year a severe escalation in the cost of fuel oil… gave coal a general price advantage in the industrial market… Despite the rapid contraction of past years, the industry is now in good shape and is increasingly seen to offer a secure and promising future to recruits.[15]

[12] NUM Conference Report, 1971, pp.134-5
[13] Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.172
[14] Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette, various issues; NCB Accounts 1953-1964
[15] NCB Accounts, 1970-71, pp.5-6; *Financial Times*, 7 January 1972; Ashworth, W., *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol.5, 1946-1982: The Nationalised Industry*, (Oxford, 1986) pp.305-6 & p.324

The brighter prospects were a temporary phenomenon based on a rise in oil prices. The Trans-Arabian Pipeline, which brought oil from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean for export to Europe, was broken in August 1970 and the Libyan Government took advantage of the shortage of oil to raise its prices. By mid-1971 major users were paying between £6.60 and £9.30 per ton for oil compared to between £3.30 and £6.00 per ton a year earlier. This rise made coal far more competitive as the pit-head price for industrial coal was between £4.75 and £5.25 at that time. The Board responded by slowing down the contraction of the industry. It did this by increasing production, slowing the rate of pit closures, and announcing, at the end of 1970, a recruitment drive to fill eight thousand jobs. The Government also took action, through measures to increase the supply of coal by giving permission for the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) to move to a greater dependency on oil.[16]

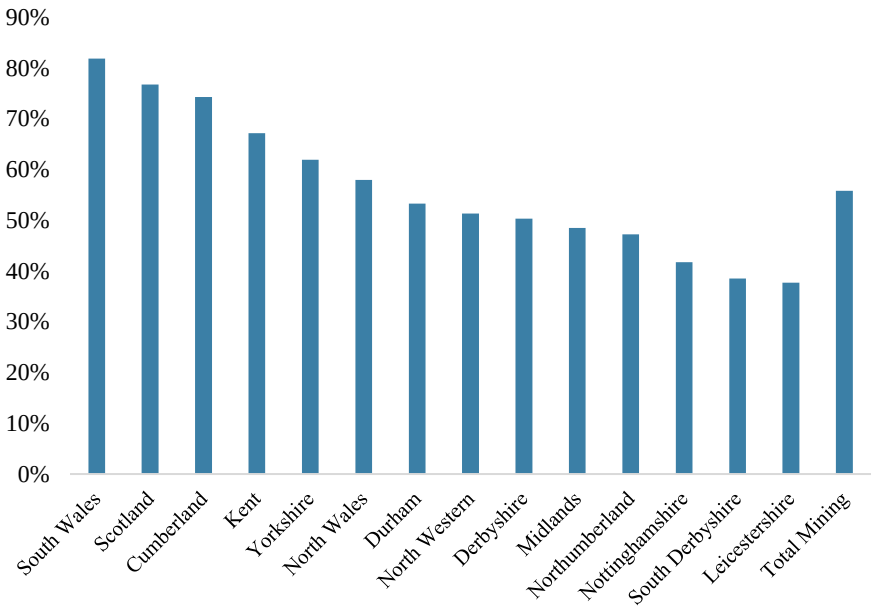
### 3.4 Rule 43

Perhaps the most significant resolution passed at the 1971 conference was the reform of the NUM's Rule 43, which had prevented the 1970 miners' strike being considered 'official' since the 55.5% majority of the votes that were cast in favour of a strike fell short of the two-thirds majority necessary for a national strike to be called under this rule (see Fig.3.3). During that strike the Derbyshire Area proposed that Rule 43 should be changed to allow a simple majority to be sufficient to call a national strike, but the NEC rejected the proposal. At this subsequent conference two conflicting resolutions on the issue were put forward, one proposing that Rule 43 be eliminated and replaced by the 'more democratic' basis of a simple majority, and a counter-resolution put forward by Lancashire Area (of which Gormley had recently stepped down as president), which was subsequently supported by the NEC, suggesting a fifty five percent majority. The supporters of a change in the rule argued that the two-thirds majority was in reality unachievable, and that failure to follow a decision that had achieved a majority but that was nonetheless insufficient to legitimise industrial action could seriously undermine the NUM's unity. Those opposed to a rule change reversed this argument and were concerned about the possibility of a large, near majority,

[16] Jackson, M.P., *The Price of Coal,* (London, 1974) pp.127-31

of disaffected opinion reflecting the experience of the 1926 General Strike and the need for a substantial majority to prevent a drift back to work.

**Fig.3.3. Percentage Vote for Strike Action by Area, 1970.**[17]




The initial resolution proposing a simple majority lost by one hundred and forty-eight votes to one hundred and sixty-five (fifty-three percent against), whilst the latter resolution proposing a fifty-five percent majority passed by two hundred and fifteen votes to ninety-eight (sixty-nine percent in favour) and became the new threshold.[18] Howell notes that the resolution passed against the opposition of some cautious Areas.[19] Robert Taylor believes that the lowering of the threshold from two thirds to fifty-five percent was a 'highly significant move at Gormley's instigation',[20] though it could be argued that the Lancashire counter-resolution backed by the NEC was designed to ensure that the lower (simple majority) threshold failed, and thus making the prospect of a strike marginally less likely. Hall believes that the hurdle was lowered to fifty-five percent largely to protect the union's integrity in the aftermath of the unofficial strikes of 1969

[17] Source: TNA: COAL26/404, Strike Ballot Results, 1970-1971 Comparison
[18] NUM Conference Report, 1971, p.175; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.51; Pitt, T*he World on Our Backs*, pp.109-10
[19] Howell, D., *The Politics of the NUM: A Lancashire view*, (Manchester, 1989) p.38
[20] Taylor, R., *The Fifth Estate: Britain's Unions in the Seventies*, revised edn. (London, 1980) p.361

and 1970.[21] Andrew Taylor concurs and sees the rule change as 'a product of the unrest of 1970', and that it laid the basis for the 1972 strike by removing the main obstacle which had made the earlier strike unofficial.[22]

### 3.5 Overtime Ban

On 14 September the NUM presented its case for wage increases to the NCB, who responded that the full wage claim could not be contemplated as the Board had only just broken even in the previous year. It stated that it could probably fund a £1.60 rise representing increases of nine percent for surface workers (against the forty-four percent claim) and eight percent for all underground workers, but with five percent to Kent and Nottinghamshire and six percent to Scotland and South Wales (against a claim of forty-seven percent for underground and seventeen percent for NPLA). The NEC rejected the NCB offer as 'shabby and insulting' and called a national delegate conference for 21 October. In his memoirs Gormley recollects meeting with Ezra at a social gathering during this period where he told him over a 'quiet drink together in a corner' that an increase of £3.50 per week would be enough to get a majority on the NEC to accept it. He also claims that he kept his discussion with Ezra secret because some of his colleagues would have felt £3.50 to have been ambitiously high. Given that the NUM were actually seeking between £5 and £9 per week, this appears to be either a false memory, or perhaps a misrepresentation of the NEC's views and of Gormley's own role in suggesting a compromise between what he was being told the NCB, with Government direction, would offer, and what the NUM were demanding. Gormley also wrote of a desire to limit the influence of Daly and the McGahey, stating: 'You can't be too careful in negotiations and sometimes it pays to be a bit secretive, even with your own side.'[23] At the NUM national delegate conference on 21 October, Daly made the case for a pay increase based on the miners' productivity record, recruitment needs, and comparability with other industries. The NEC and Daly had been criticised during the 1969 strike by the Yorkshire strike committee for their refusal to recognise the miners' traditional vanguard role in the labour movement

[21] Hall, T., *King Coal: miners, coal and Britain's industrial future*, (Harmondsworth, 1981) pp. 149–65
[22] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.214
[23] Gormley, J., *Battered Cherub*, (London, 1982) pp.85-7

and that the strike was a reflection of this position.[24] In an attempt to restore his left credentials amongst the increasingly militant members, that had been tarnished by his refusal to back unofficial action over the previous two years, he portrayed the strike, possibly quite accurately, as a political challenge to the Conservative Government. He stated that the NUM was:

> in the vanguard, because a whole number of other Unions large and small are awaiting the outcome of the miners' struggle and the miners' settlement… we are fighting for the rest of the trade union movement, and on the basis of our struggle I believe it is possible to create a broad unity in the trade union movement that will smash Conservative economic policy and help to pave the way for the defeat of the Tory Government and return a Labour Government which will introduce economic policies that can receive the full support of the trade union movement.

The conference called for a ballot on whether to proceed with strike action if the situation should warrant it, and for the ballot to be preceded by a ban on overtime from 1 November. Daly informed the conference that the NEC would make an approach to the TUC, and to the various transport unions, for support in the event of a strike to ensure that there would be no movement of coal. He also made an appeal to members 'to set up liaison committees both at Area, colliery, workshop and plant level with regard to the implementation of the overtime ban.' He noted that it was the Union's intention: 'to ensure that the overtime ban makes deep inroads into the stocks… so we can consequently strengthen the bargaining position of our Union in the coming weeks'.[25] The key reason for the overtime ban was in order to run down coal stocks prior to beginning a strike, and it was estimated that the ban reduced deliveries to the power stations by about twenty percent. Another aspect of the ban was that it would have the effect of demonstrating how low were the real level of wages, since the vast majority of miners regularly worked overtime, and an overtime ban would therefore create a national sense of injustice and strengthen the miners resolve for the forthcoming vote and subsequent strike.[26] A miner from Bedwas Lodge, South Wales observed this aspect: 'Without the overtime ban the strike would not have been a success it was… they realized now what their wages were.'[27] Within the NEC there were

[24] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, pp.27-8
[25] Warwick University, Modern Records Centre (MRC): NUM Special Delegate Conference Report, 21 October 1971; McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) pp.198-200; Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, pp.111-2
[26] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.216-21
[27] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.15 Interview, Bedwas Lodge SC

three views of the rationale for the overtime ban: that it was 'an act in its own right - an alternative to strike action; that it would make inroads into coal stocks; and that it was a delaying tactic that would allow time to campaign.[28] There was a belief that if there were to be a strike it should start as soon as possible, but that it was first necessary to reduce coal stocks, and also that it would be psychologically better to strike after Christmas. There was also some hope that if the overtime ban were successful then there would be no need for a strike.[29] The NEC set out six guiding principles of such a ban: that liaison committees were to be established to supervise the ban and to liaise with other unions; that no cover was to be provided for absentees; that no WPIS was expected to work overtime; that no overtime was to be undertaken except where it concerned the safety of the men or the preservation of the mine; that no activity was to take place during overtime, breaks or mealtimes; and that clerical overtime was permissible only for assistance to another member.[30]

The decision on whether and how to proceed with the ban was taken at local branch meetings. In Kent the ban was widely welcomed as long-overdue national action, though there was some opposition from 'big overtime men'. Pitt notes that a colliery is a circuit of production with each job relying on each other job, such that if one part of the circuit stops the whole circuit comes to a standstill. He describes how under normal conditions rules are bent and health and safety concerns often ignored in order to keep production going for the benefit of the whole production process, and repair jobs are therefore often undertaken whilst machine are still running or during break times or shift changes to ensure that production continues apace. However, during an overtime ban, everything is done according to the book, and repair work must only be undertaken during production time. Men become 'walking editions of the Mines and Quarries Act' and inform officials of what work can and cannot be undertaken, and what is unsafe or illegal. In response officials retaliate by strict application of meal and break times, keep men waiting to ride the lift, and implement a host of regulations that make life difficult for the miners. The division between colliers and officials therefore becomes more sharply defined.[31] This widening of the demarcation

[28] Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p.180
[29] Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.52
[30] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.201
[31] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, pp.113-4

between miners and officials was to have a significant effect on the subsequent strike, and is discussed further in Chapter Six.

### 3.6 Liaison Committees

Daly's statement instructed safety and maintenance work to be continued during the overtime ban. In normal conditions this tended to be undertaken during overtime, and therefore by banning overtime this essential work had to be undertaken during production time. The implementation of Daly's instructions was undertaken by the local liaison committees, and therefore their interpretation was determined by the make-up, and the militancy or otherwise, of the local committee. This led to a variety of different approaches with some committees being more militant than the membership whilst others were more moderate. In some pits, attempts were made to stop overmen and deputies undertaking any safety work at all. As the strike progressed the liaison committees at some pits lost control of the rank-and-file entirely.[32] Taylor notes that a novel feature of the strike was its high level of organisation, in particular the creation of liaison committees and a comprehensive network of contacts between the NUM and other unions to provide intelligence about when and where to place pickets.[33] The committees themselves were not an entirely novel feature as left activists in Yorkshire during the unofficial 1969 strike had organised strike committees and excluded Area officials that were hostile to the strike.[34] The liaison committees in 1972 were established in part to regulate problems between the different parts of a colliery and in particular between the different unions' interests especially over the question of undertaking safety and maintenance work in the pit. They were therefore comprised of representatives from NACODS, CAWU (Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union) and COSA (Colliery Officials' Staff Association) in addition to WPIS, NUM branch members, and tradesmen such as electricians. On 5 November NACODS members were instructed by their national leadership not to join the liaison committees, though some continued to participate at local level.[35]

[32] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.215-7; McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.205-6

[33] NUM, AS Circular, 300/71, 30 December 1971; BS Circular, 5/1972, 6 January 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.219

[34] Darlington, R. & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain, 1972*, (London, 2001) pp.34-5

[35] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, pp.114-5

### 3.7 Liaison Committee Case Studies

The liaison committee at Cronton colliery, Lancashire, was established early in the overtime ban and comprised three branch officials along with the representatives of the pit tradesmen, COSA and NACODS. All queries relating to the ban were subsequently addressed to the committee. It sanctioned the NEC guidelines and discussed matters arising during the overtime ban, including investigating the issue of belt maintenance work being undertaken at weekends, i.e. during overtime.[36] Once the strike began, the liaison committee effectively transformed into a strike committee and dealt with all questions relating to maintenance and safety issues, and the organisation of picketing. It was concerned to ensure that it adopted comparable procedures to the other pits in the St. Helens Panel (district) and the branch agreed for the liaison committee to accept full charge of the dispute.[37] It then met at the end of each strike week and agreed for two additional tradesmen (one electrical and one blacksmith) to participate. Each week there were calls for more pickets and decisions were taken about where to picket with the main focus being the power stations at Fiddlers Ferry, Warrington and Lister Drive, Liverpool. The committee agreed to refund pickets' expenses at ten shillings per day for car users, plus bus fares for those who claimed. Later it was decided to hire a mini-bus for picket use, and to give a meal allowance of five shillings, and it was agreed that a claim should be made to the branch for extra expenses for picketing. The liaison committee also dealt with requests for coal to be supplied to pensioners and to local schools, which they agreed should be supplied subject to definite need. As stocks diminished the committee subsequently agreed to open the local landsale site to merchant wagons subject to: 1) a docket system, 2) no 'blacked' wagons[38], 3) sufficient coal to be retained for emergency after the strike for mineworkers, and 4) that pickets are available to travel with the lorries to ensure coal for priority use only.[39]

The issue concerning the undertaking of safety and maintenance work developed during the course of the strike. At the outset there were twenty-five men working for safety reasons, though at the first meeting on 14 January it was agreed that

[36] Knowsley Archives, Kirkby Library (KL): KA25/U/M11, Minute Book of NUM Committees, Cronton Colliery Branch 1967-72 (Cronton Minutes), pp.215-7
[37] KL: KA25/U/M11, Cronton Minutes, pp.228-9
[38] Banned or blacklisted
[39] KL: KA25/U/M11, Cronton Minutes, pp.230-6

Cronton should fall in line with other Lancashire pits and withdraw pumpsmen from 24 January. The following week (21 January) it was noted that two pumpers had been withdrawn so that no NUM men then worked underground, and that the position would continue to be reviewed weekly. There was a request for additional men to work on the powerhouse, but this was rejected, and it was agreed to stop using shaftsmen after forty-eight hours-notice had been given. At the branch meeting on 23 January the committee discussed withdrawing safety men, pumpsmen and shaftsmen, but the position was kept under review. The 28 January meeting then discussed a letter signed by thirty-four men regarding whether to picket NACODS members undertaking safety work, and one of the COSA representatives reported on COSA's decision to withdraw its own safety members. The meeting agreed that these matters be discussed at the general branch meeting on 6 February. At the 4 February committee meeting it was recommended: that all safety men be withdrawn except winders and those at the power-house; that NACODS should be approached and told that they should only do their own duties underground and not to undertake NUM jobs on the surface; and that a picket be established on NACODS to ensure that this was adhered to. These recommendations were subsequently accepted by a large majority at the 6 February general branch meeting. The 10 February liaison committee meeting then reported that NACODS had agreed to do only their own duties.[40] The liaison committee also organised for branch members to attend rallies during the dispute including a one-day strike and mass meeting organised by Liverpool Trades Council on 26 January, which members were expected to attend. It also requested full support from members at a demonstration on 11 February when Heath was due to be in Liverpool, and plans were made for the branch to be represented at the lobby of Parliament. The committee also reviewed the Wilberforce Report, and agreed to accept the NEC recommendation subject to clarification of details. It subsequently organised the pithead ballot on acceptance and agreed that if a return to work was agreed then it would negotiate this with management and would recommend to the manager that those who had undertaken picketing duties, where available, be given preference for weekend work (overtime).[41]

The Abertillery district NUM in Monmouthshire represented lodges including Cwmtillery, Celynon, Arrael Griffin, Markham, Roseheyworth, Marine, Beynons

[40] KL: KA25/U/M11, Cronton Minutes, pp.230-6
[41] KL: KA25/U/M11, Cronton Minutes, pp.230-9

and Blaenavon collieries.[42] Here the miners' agent[43] called a strike organisation meeting of all the lodges on the first Wednesday of the strike. Some, such as Markham, had already been picketing coal sites before then, but following the meeting a chain of command was established, and overlapping work was eliminated. The two key activities to be undertaken were picketing and the distribution of coal to priority customers. There was technically no strike committee, but operations were run from the Abertillery Miners' Institute and manned by lodge officials, notably the secretaries of Roseheyworth and Cwmtillery collieries, which were based in the town. Instructions would be passed down from the agent to the Abertillery Institute and then relayed to the various lodge secretaries, who would organise picketing and coal distribution locally. The key task of the pickets was to close the open-cast coal sites of Darren, Blain Yr Un, Ryan's Tip, Penybont, Christiani Chand and Cardiff Pend, which held about one hundred thousand tons of coal stocks between them, and pickets were also put on Llanwern Steel Works and Newport Wharf. Within a few days all movement of coal was halted and just one picket per site was needed. The pickets received rank-and-file support from TGWU drivers, and were informed by one that four non-union drivers were operating at the Ryan's Pond site. Pickets subsequently forced these drivers to join the TGWU, in order to continue delivering priority coal. Priority deliveries followed a request from a customer, accompanied by a doctor's note, which was then vetted by the lodge secretary and committee. If agreed the miners' agent was notified, and he then gave the order to the coal yard which instructed a merchant using TGWU drivers, and the delivery was accompanied by a lodge member. Coal distribution was therefore completely controlled by the NUM lodges. The police telexes, however, show a slightly different picture of the picketing that took place;[44] essentially more sites and more pickets than was remembered. The telexes show that in the first week that eight sites were being picketed by between eight and thirty-six pickets. In the second week, picketing continued at power stations, though with reduced numbers, and also at seven collieries, which each had around twelve pickets. The third week involved largely the same sites, but the numbers dropped significantly with a maximum of four pickets at almost all, and this was maintained in the fourth and fifth weeks when the number of sites halved to eight including the

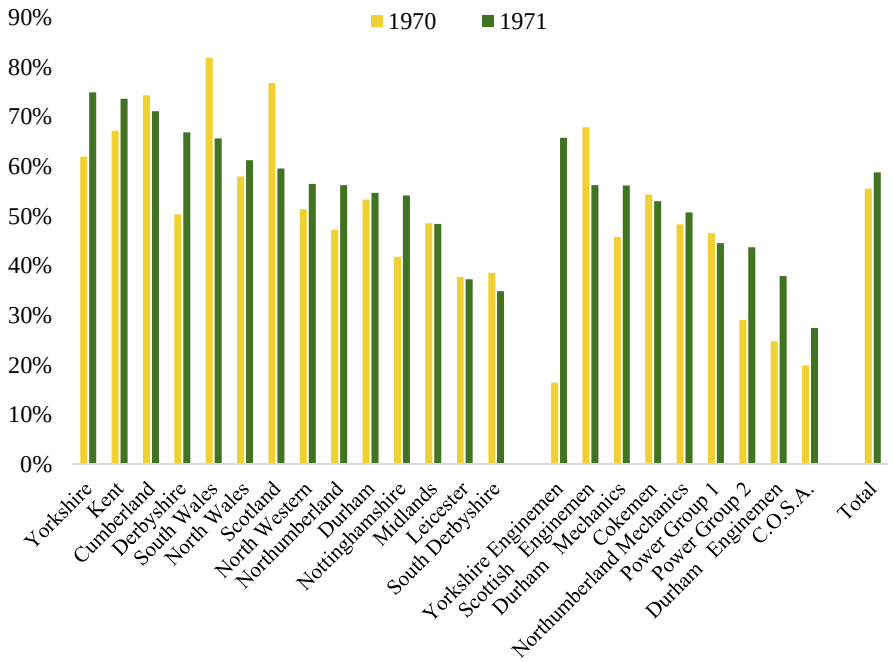
[42] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix III, Interview, Abertillery District SC
[43] The senior NUM Area repesentative
[44] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Gwent, 17, 24 & 31 January, 7 & 14 February 1972

power stations and just one colliery. The continuation of picketing at some collieries throughout the first five weeks of the strike implies the picketing of NACODS members, though may have included priority coal being sent out. All picketing was described as peaceful, with no incidents.

## 3.8 Strike Vote

A national ballot was held on 22 November as to whether to proceed to strike action with a result, giving a 58.8% majority in favour, announced 2 December. The NEC recommended a strike to begin from 9 January. Twelve of the NUM's twenty-three Areas and groupings produced a majority above the required fifty-five percent.[45] The two largest Areas, which between them represented some thirty four percent of miners, had large majorities for strike action with Yorkshire at seventy-five percent and South Wales at sixty-five-and-a-half (see Figs 3.4 and 3.5).

**Fig.3.4. Comparison of Area Votes for Strike Action, 1970 & 1971, (percentage).**[46]




[45] There were fourteen mining Areas, and nine non-miner groupings comprising COSA members, cokemen, enginemen, mechanics, and power group workers

[46] Source: TNA: COAL26/404, Strike Ballot Results, 1970-1971 Comparison

**Fig.3.5 Comparison of Area Votes for Strike Action, 1970 & 1971, (thousands).**[47]

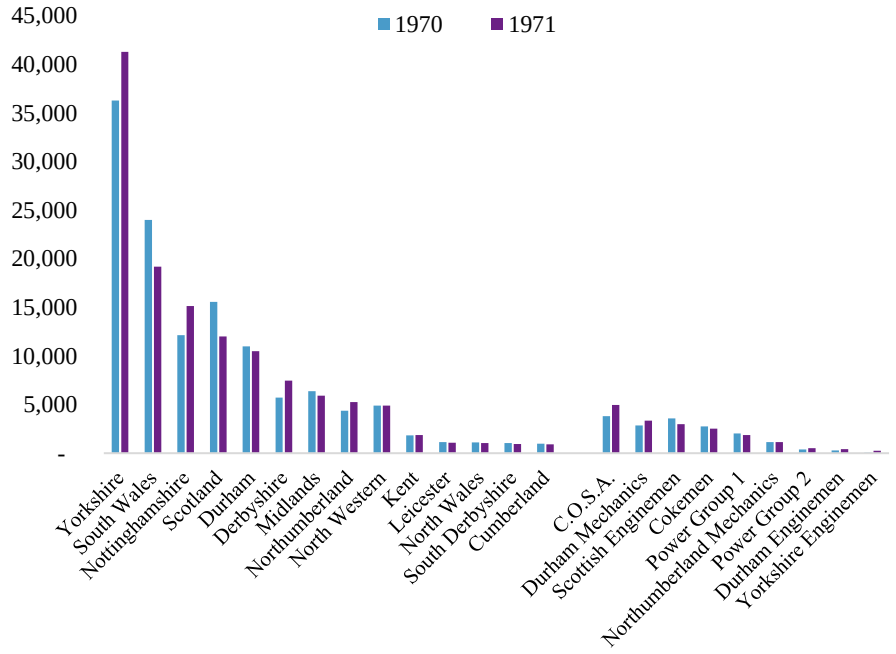
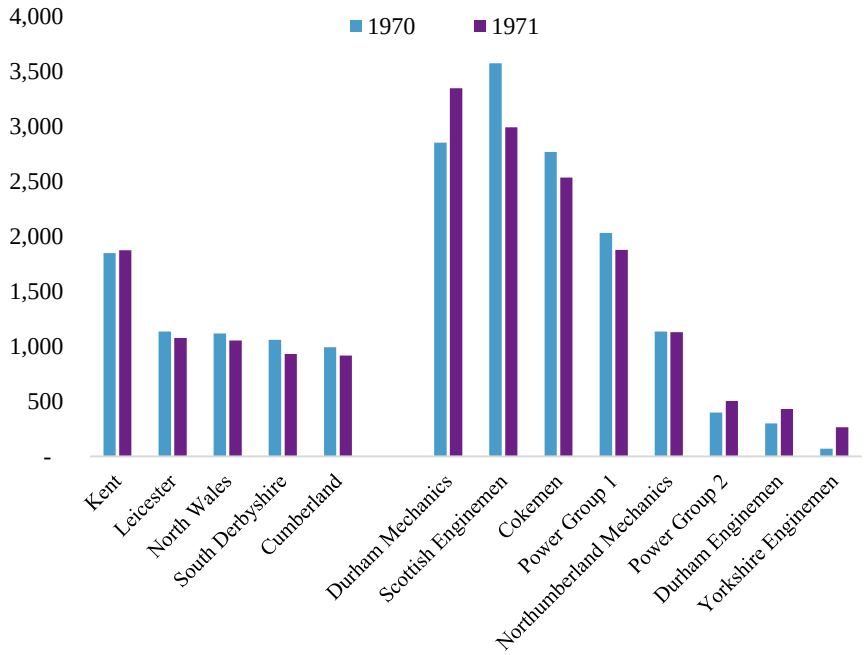


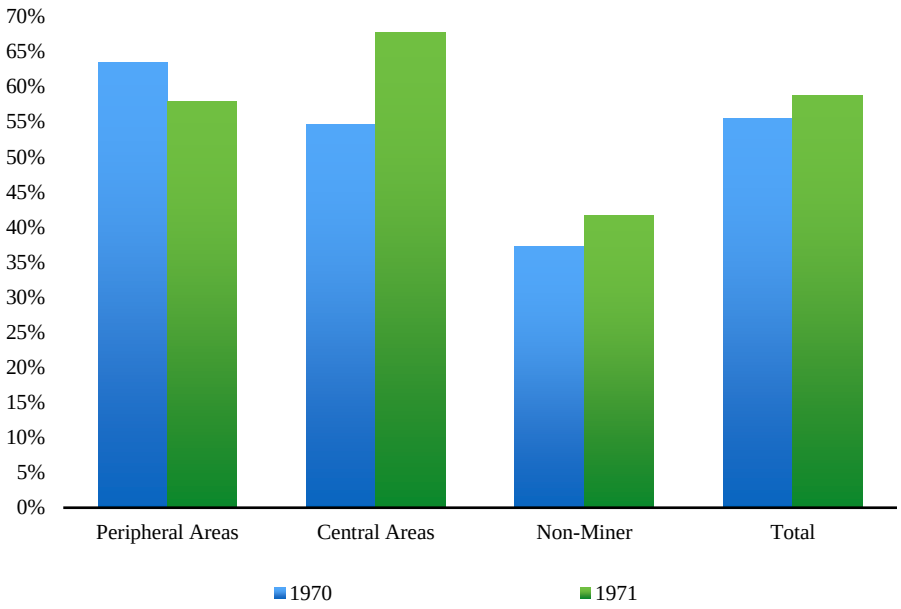

**Fig.3.5a Comparison of Area Votes for Strike Action, 1970 & 1971, (thousands) - Extract.**[48]




[47] Source: TNA: COAL26/404, Strike Ballot Results, 1970-1971 Comparison
[48] Source: TNA: COAL26/404, Strike Ballot Results, 1970-1971 Comparison

Most Areas saw an increase in the percentage voting for strike action in 1971 compared to 1970, with the notable exceptions being the CP-led Areas of Scotland and Wales, which decreased from very high levels but still produced significant majorities for strike action in 1971. The percentage vote in the peripheral coalfields decreased between 1970 and 1971 whilst the central Areas saw an increase, in part due to the growing effect of the NPLA on their wages. The non-mining grouping, comprising enginemen, mechanics, clerical and power workers, also saw a percentage increase in votes in favour of strike action, but nevertheless acted to pull the overall total down (see Fig.3.6).

**Fig.3.6. Comparison of Peripheral, Central and Non-Miner Votes for Strike Action, 1970 & 1971 (percentage).**[49]




If the non-mining grouping was excluded, the miners' vote was in fact over sixty-two percent. Given a total national vote in favour at 58.8% against a threshold of fifty-five percent (i.e. almost four per cent above), some historians have seen this as a close result,[50] though one could argue that the winning margin was actually wider than this comparison suggests, as over one sixth more miners voted for strike action than against. The Government also read more into the margin of

[49] Source: TNA: COAL26/404, Strike Ballot Results, 1970-1971 Comparison

[50] Lyddon, D., '"Glorious Summer", 1972: the High Tide of Rank and File Militancy' in McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. & Campbell, A., *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79*, (Monmouth, 2007) p.329; Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, (London, 2009) p.63; Sandbrook, D., *State of Emergency. The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974*, (London, 2010) p.115-6

victory than was warranted. Carr told Cabinet that support appeared: 'to have been concentrated in the traditionally militant areas; and any strike, therefore, might not prove in the event to be on a national basis. Coal stocks were in any case high.'[51] This was a misreading of the situation in several regards. Firstly, support was not concentrated in the traditional militant areas; it was strongest, both numerically and in percentage terms, in Yorkshire – a latecomer to militancy – and had increased by almost a third in the moderate East Midlands Area in the central coalfield. Secondly, the fact that the threshold had been reached meant that an official national strike was sanctioned, and therefore all Areas would participate. The only reason that the 1969 and 1970 strikes were restricted and not undertaken on a national basis, were that they failed to achieve the higher threshold and were therefore deemed 'unofficial'. Lastly, coal stocks were not as high as assumed, or at least were not well distributed (see Chapter Five).

## 3.9 Conclusion

This chapter showed that the 1971 NUM conference decision to seek a large percentage pay rise was a product of the discontent that had arisen during the previous decade, and was sanctioned by the NUM leadership primarily as a means of containing the growing militancy amongst the membership. The discontent was partly due to miners' wages having been held back in order to stave off further closures in the industry, and the large wage claim was thus an attempt to redress the imbalance in their wages relative to comparable industrial and public-sector workers. The claim was based on the temporary phenomenon of oil prices exceeding coal prices, and the subsequent illusion of better prospects for the industry suggested by the Board's accounts. In making the claim, the NUM members were in defiance of the leadership's advice that had served to simply hold their wages back since the industry had contracted in spite of their restraint. They were therefore prepared to make a stand to restore wage levels even if this entailed further contraction. The Government received advice implying that miners were selfishly seeking higher wages without job losses, whereas the Government's contrary position - low wages and the continued contraction of the industry - was arguably the cause of the dispute. The chapter showed that the

[51] TNA: CAB128/49/61, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 2 December 1971; Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.53

conference decision to lower the threshold for strike action proposed by the more militant Areas, was intended to make it easier to call an official strike. The leadership had rejected the initial proposal and backed a counter-proposal, which though lowering the threshold, decreased it by a lesser amount and thus made an official strike marginally less likely. The subsequent ballot cleared the lower threshold, but by a relatively small margin, and was taken by the Government to mean that the miners would not be united in the conduct of the strike; this gave the Government a misplaced confidence and informed its subsequent negotiating strategy in which it believed that it had the upper hand. The chapter demonstrated that the overtime ban had a galvanising effect on the miners and prepared them for the forthcoming strike, by running down the coal stocks, forging a unity over the wage claim, and in particular by creating an organisational structure to deal with issues that arose. These liaison committees seamlessly transformed into strike committees that organised and controlled the picketing at a local level. They also demonstrated a disconnect between the national leadership, who set out the guidelines for the conduct of the strike, and the local branches who interpreted and implemented them. This led to significant divergence, particularly over the question of safety and maintenance work in the pits. The division between the miners and NACODS officials, who undertook this work, was exacerbated during the overtime ban and would grow into open hostility during the subsequent strike.

# Chapter 4

## Wages and Negotiations

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will assess the historic decline of miners' wages and compare the NUM's 1971 wage claim to contemporary claims of other public sector, manual and low paid workers, and will consider the issue of low pay more generally. It will assess the Government's desire to confront the public sector and to control wage inflation, of which its 'N minus 1 Norm' (N-1), was a part. It will demonstrate that the application of N-1 was inconsistent and arbitrary, that it was largely ignored in the private sector, and that the Government took no account of the merits of the miners' case. It will show that British inflation levels and wage settlements were comparable to those of other leading economies, and that the conditions pertaining in Britain were not untypical. The incoming Heath Government had promised a 'quiet revolution' that would take government out of the market place, and this chapter will compare the Government's professed desire to remain detached from the negotiations with its actual role in dictating the terms and the time-frame within which the NCB could negotiate. The chapter will assess the various meetings between the Government and representatives of the NCB and the NUM and will consider the issue of arbitration, which was variously denounced and supported by both sides, and was used by the Government in an attempt to swing public opinion against the miners. It will further consider the role played by the leaders of the NUM and the TUC in negotiating behind the backs of the NEC and of the rank-and-file to contain the wage rise, and the distrust that this engendered and exacerbated amongst the miners. The chapter will review the Wilberforce Commission, which the Government established to settle the dispute when it came to the realisation that

it was not possible to maintain its restrictive pay norm, and will assess the miners' ultimate return to work on better terms after further negotiations.

## 4.2 Control of Wage Inflation

Both Labour and the Conservatives desired to control inflation, which had been creeping upwards, and Labour's National Plan (1965) introduced a limit on the extent to which incomes could rise; this was initially (1965-66) a voluntary policy and later (1966-70) a statutory policy. Following the 1966 Sterling crisis the Wilson Government introduced a six month pay 'freeze' followed by six months of 'severe restraint', which was imposed with the agreement of trade union executives. Incomes policies divided opinion within the labour movement, with some, particularly in the trade union leadership, seeing them as an impingement on the role of unions to secure the best possible deal for their members, but many others seeing them as a form of 'socialist planning' when undertaken by a Labour Government, and as a price worth paying for the social and economic benefits of price control.[1] However the Wilson Government focused most closely on incomes, rather than prices, and at the NUM 1970 conference miners proposed the removal of the policy.[2] The 1970 Conservative election manifesto promised to bring inflation under control, whilst placing the blame for it on public sector wages, stating: 'We will subject all proposed price rises in the public sector to the most searching scrutiny. If they are not justified, they will not be allowed. In implementing our policies, we will give overriding priority to bringing the present inflation under control.'[3] This pledge envisaged an incomes policy applied to the public sector with a vague hope that the private sector would also comply. Six months after winning the election the Heath Cabinet met at Chequers to discuss strategies for dealing with inflation and for handling the likely consequential industrial unrest, and where the need to both challenge the public sector pay awards and to win that confrontation was expressed. Carr suggested that the Government needed someone in a major sector to stand firm, take a strike, and

[1] Thorpe, A., 'The Labour Party and the Trade Unions', in McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. & Campbell, A., (Eds.), *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79*, (Monmouth, 2007) pp.135-6; Pelling, H., *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 4th edn., (Harmondsworth, 1987) pp.252-3

[2] Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.37

[3] Craig, F.W.S., (Ed.), *British General Election Manifestos 1959-1987*, 3rd edn. (Aldershot, 1990) pp.119-20

not back down, and Heath saw this as an attractive option.[4] The miners' strike became such a dispute and the *Guardian* later observed that the Government saw it as 'a battle it must not lose if it wants to maintain its control over the current level of wage settlements in the public sector.'[5] To combat inflation, the Conservatives introduced a mechanism to restrain public sector wages in the spring of 1971, known as the 'N minus 1 Norm', where each annual wage settlement round in the public sector was required to be one percentage point less than the previous (N) settlement round. N-1 was presented, by the Government, as a fact of life which not even it could affect such that ministers could withdraw from wage bargaining whilst imposing their wishes.[6] It urged private companies to follow the example of that being imposed on the public sector. Wigham notes that 'there could hardly have been a more provocative policy', and Barnett believes that the policy amounted to a direct attempt to reduce the standard of living of wage-earners and the working-class. Even the Chancellor's assistant Brendon Sewill was rather sceptical calling it a 'makeshift policy on pay'.[7] David Watt, *Financial Times* political editor, writing during the second week of the strike, was critical of N-1 and in particular of its application by the Government, stating that it had 'serious long-term drawbacks which arise from its lack of clarity and its lack of "fairness" as the man in the street understands that term.' He went on to say that 'a norm strictly and universally applied can be clear and fair… On the other hand a semi-public norm which changes constantly and which is apparently capriciously applied… may well leave behind a legacy of muddle and bitterness which it will take many years to clear up.' He noted that if one suggests that the Government might adopt 'a less embattled approach' one is told that inflation must be brought under control first before exploring these possibilities. He concluded by saying: 'It may be so, but I persist in wondering whether the political cost of beating inflation need be quite so high.'[8]

[4] TNA:CAB164/1158, Meeting Notes, Chequers, 'Strategy for Dealing with Inflation', 14 November 1970; Taylor, R., 'The Heath government and industrial relations: myth and reality' in Ball, S. & Seldon, A., *The Heath Government 1970-74: A Reappraisal*, (London, 1996) pp.168-9

[5] *Guardian*, 17 January 1972

[6] Barnett, A., 'Class Struggle and the Heath Government', *New Left Review*, Vol.1, No.77, Jan-Feb 1973, p.8

[7] Wigham, E., *Strikes and the Government 1893-1974*, (London, 1976) p.165; Barnett, 'Class Struggle', p.7; Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) p.11

[8] *Financial Times*, 21 January 1972. This article was in line with the general approach of the *FT* in demonstrating support for workers grievances and of holding government to account, or at least in reporting on these issues with some neutrality.

Following the Conservative budget in April 1971, when the unemployment figure was standing at eight hundred and fifteen thousand, inflation and unemployment rose sharply with inflation reaching nine percent in the winter of 1971/72, roughly three times what it had been in 1965.[9] The relatively full employment in the post-war period had weakened both the employer's hand in relation to the unions, and the union leadership's hand in relation to the militancy within the membership, allowing the latter to impose sanctions with or without the support of the leadership.[10] A move away from full employment was desirable to many employers, and unemployment jumped around fifty percent between 1971 and 1972, passing the one million mark in January 1972 for the first time since 1947.[11] Gilbert Hunt, chief executive of Chrysler UK, commenting on the passing of this milestone was 'surprised that the shake-up of industry designed to produce greater efficiency had not resulted in 3 million unemployed, instead of just 1 million.' He believed that: 'The unemployed should not be reabsorbed into manufacturing industry' since 'fewer, not more, industrial workers are needed'.[12]

### 4.3 Low Wages

In November 1969 the NCB agreed to a wage increase of 27s. 6d. per week for daywagemen, which raised the minimum adult wage paid to surface workers to £15 per week (10.1% rise), and that paid to underground workers to £16 per week (9.4%). It also agreed to an increase of 24s. per week (4.4%) to all those under the NPLA except the most highly paid such that those in the Nottinghamshire Area who received 20s. per week and those in Kent who received 9s. per week. In November 1970 the Board granted pay increases of £2.80 to £3.00 per week for daywagemen, which raised the minimum adult wage of surface workers to £18 a week (c.18.4% to 20.0%) and of underground workers to £19 a week

[9] Morgan, K.O., *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989*, (Oxford, 1990) p.323; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.172

[10] Weekes, B., *Industrial relations and the limits of law: The industrial effects of the Industrial Relations Act, 1971*, (Oxford, 1975) p.186

[11] Phillips, J., 'Industrial Relations, Historical Contingencies and Political Economy: Britain in the 1960s and 1970s', *Labour History Review*, Vol.72, No.3, December 2007, p.225; Dorfman, G.A., *Government versus Trade Unionism in British Politics since 1968*, (London, 1979) p.69

[12] New People's History Museum, Manchester: CP/IND/RAM/02/03, Ramelson papers, *Financial Times*, cutting (undated, c.21 January 1972)

(c.17.2% to 18.8%). All those under the NPLA were given an increase of £2.37½ (£2 7s 6d) a week (5.5%).[13]

Immediately prior to the strike Daly set out 'The miner's case' putting their wage claim in the context of the low wages in the coal industry. He noted that eighty-eight thousand NUM members had a gross wage below £20, 'which puts many of them below the Government level for Family Income Supplement - the poverty line.' He cited a miner whose take home pay was £13.60 and who would receive an extra £2 a week under the Board's final offer of 7.9%, and he attacked 'those who play the percentage game' who argue that some miners are getting a forty-five percent increase. Daly noted that such a percentage is based on miners taking home £13 or £14 a week or even less, and he claimed to have 'told Mr. Ezra that we'll gladly settle for three percent of his £20,000 salary.' He argued that the 'percentage game' can be played in a different way to show that overall productivity in the industry rose by fifteen percent between 1967 and 1971, but that the average miner's real earnings were lower at the start of 1971 than in 1967. He noted that it would take an across the board increase of more than £5 to restore miners to the relative position of 1967.[14]

Daly's comments were taken up by the press with a *New Statesman* article referring to a 'man in Leicestershire who said he was on strike because he was ashamed to hand over his pay-packet of £15 a week for work on the coal face, to a wife making £25 a week in a factory.'[15] The DTI also made reference to the issue in an early Progress Report to the Cabinet, which noted that the NCB had analysed all payrolls for one week in December 1971, which showed that: 'while it is true that some take home no more than £13 cash this is partly due to deduction at source of rent for (subsidised) NCB housing and of voluntary National Savings which are commonly made by miners even the lower paid.'[16] During the debate in the commons, several MPs quoted from miners' wage slips to show the level of take home pay. David Crouch, (Conservative) claimed to have a pay-slip from the previous week for a married miner from Betteshanger Colliery in his constituency, whose 'gross pay is £18 a week and his deductions for tax and National Insurance are £3.40. His take-home pay is £14.60. He also has to pay

[13] NCB Accounts, 1969-70, p.35, & 1970-71, p.36. Both decimal and imperial figures used
[14] TNA: COAL31/383, Transcript, Daly, 'The miner's case', 7 January 1972
[15] *New Statesman*, Vol.83, No.2130, 14 January 1972, p.34
[16] TNA: PREM15/984, Progress Report on the Coal Strike (PRCS) 2, 13 January 1972

£4.50 in rent for the council house in which he lives.' He also cited the wages of other colliery workers: 'a married electrician, with no children, whose gross pay is £19.40. His take-home pay is £14 a week… a surface worker aged 18½ whose gross pay is £15 a week. His take-home pay is £11.30.[17] Don Concannon, (Labour) noted that even for the highest paid miners - NPLA men who were on £30 a week - the Board's suggested raise would not amount to much. He noted that:

> Such a man with two children must pay £3.64 tax, £1.59 insurance and 35p other deductions, giving him a total take-home pay of £24.42. He is offered an extra £1.90 giving him a total of £31.90; his tax goes up to £4.21, his insurance to £1.63 and his other deductions stay at 35p, giving him a take-home wage of £25.71, representing an increase of £1.29. How much of that increase would be lost automatically by the 11 per cent. rise in the cost of living.[18]

The distinction between wages represented in percentage as opposed to absolute terms was highlighted by Hilde Behrend, an academic who undertook pilot studies and surveys in Britain and Ireland between the early 1960s and the early 1970s. Her research noted that in a 1966 survey the great majority of male employees who were interviewed expressed their last pay increase as an amount per week and that only a small minority expressed it in percentage terms, unlike policy makers and negotiators. It also found that the majority of those who received a raise of less than £1 per week felt that it made little or no difference, whereas those who received £2 or more per week felt that it had made a difference. This 'perceptual threshold zone' of between £1 and £2 in the British survey 1966, was found to be between £2 and £2.50 per week in 1971, in a similar survey in Dublin. Those surveyed also expressed the view that the increase was 'small' or was only just enough to catch up with 'the cost of living'. Behrend also found a general lack of knowledge of inflation and income's policy, noting that: 'In 1971, when the mass media had been stressing the acceleration in the rate of inflation for months, 37% of survey sample did not know the meaning of the word "inflation"'.[19] The issue of wage increases for low paid workers, and the distinction between those represented in absolute, as opposed to percentage, terms was raised during the Parliamentary debates on the strike. Minister for

[17] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.301
[18] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.267
[19] Behrend, H., 'Research into Attitudes to Inflation and Incomes Policy', *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol.5, No.3, 1978, pp.136-47

Trade and Industry John Davies backed the Board's position by citing figures which showed: 'that average adult earnings for the week ending 9th October, 1971, were in excess of £30, including allowances in kind amounting to some £2.' Mr. Hardy (Labour) observed that the figures cited were for the period before the overtime ban and so included overtime earnings.[20] Baroness Bacon (Labour) also raised the issue of miners' wages being bolstered by overtime pay and cited a statement issued by the Board purporting to show how well miners were paid. She noted that: 'for the week ending October 9 the gross average wage for a surface worker was £25.10. But the basic rate for a surface worker is £18 a week, so they must have worked 12 hours overtime, or in other words 10 hours a day, in order to get the princely sum of £25.10.'[21] Mr. Stewart-Smith (Conservative) noted that it was: 'inaccurate to talk about percentage increases being adequate, because the base line was so low.'[22] Several members also made comparisons between the wages being earned by miners and those earned by other low paid workers. Mr. Crouch (Conservative) claimed to have 'been told by many miners that their wives and daughters earn more than they do.'[23] Mr. Varley (Labour) quoted a striking miner who had told him the previous week that: 'Dustmen and grave diggers are paid more than surface craftsmen, and, while I do not begrudge them their pay, miners should receive a fair wage as well.'[24]

Miners were particularly frustrated because their wages had slipped relative to other comparable workers during the previous decade (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). The Wilberforce report noted that the information [in Table 4.2] indicated the relative decline in miners' wages, but that the figures could be no more than illustrative since the precise dimensions of the relative decline vary according to the statistical series on pay that is used, and the base date that is chosen for comparison. It noted, however, that after careful study of a variety of alternative measures and base dates, the Inquiry was able to draw no conclusion other than that a serious fall had occurred in the relative pay position of the mineworkers, when compared with those in manufacturing industry. The apparent recovery of some lost ground in 1971 was partly to be explained by the 1970 settlement in coalmining which favoured some low paid workers, and also by the fact that

[20] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 cc.235-329
[21] HL Deb, 31 January 1972, vol.327 c.623
[22] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.279
[23] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.301
[24] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.329

earnings in manufacturing in October, 1971 were depressed below trend by the recession in business conditions.[25] Table 4.2 is slightly misleading given that the minimum wages for adult mine-workers at the beginning of the strike, i.e. without the addition of overtime, were £30 per week for NPLA face workers, £19 per week for other underground workers and £18 per week for surface workers.

**Table 4.1. Comparison of Average Weekly Earnings in the Coal, Production, and Manufacturing Industries, 1960-1971.**[26]

| **Industry** | **1960*** | **1961*** | **1966*** | **1967*** | **1970*** | **1971*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coal Industry | 15.96 | 16.87 | 21.60 | 22.60 | 27.70 | 28.00 |
| All Production (P) | 14.10 | 15.06 | 20.25 | 20.55 | 26.80 | 29.70 |
| All Manufacture (M) | 14.81 | 15.76 | 20.96 | 21.13 | 27.30 | 30.20 |
| Coal as % of P | 113 | 112 | 107 | 110 | 103 | 94 |
| Coal as % of M | 108 | 107 | 103 | 107 | 101 | 93 |

(*April of each year, £)

**Table 4.2. Movement in the Relative Weekly Earnings in Coal Mining Compared to Manufacturing, 1960-1970.**[27]

| **Industry** | **1960*** | **1965*** | **1968*** | **1970*** | **1971*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coal Mining | 16.28 | 21.21 | 24.12 | 28.01 | 31.65 |
| All Manufacturing | 15.16 | 20.16 | 22.82 | 28.91 | 31.36 |
| Rank of Miners (1) | 3rd | 3rd | 5th | 12th | 9th |
| Coal as % of Manufacturing | 107.4 | 105.2 | 105.7 | 96.9 | 100.9 |

(* October of each year, £)

(1) Out of 21 industry groups

Government and NCB records demonstrate that both were well aware of, and discussed internally, comparative public sector wages, with regard to the miners' claim. In September 1971 a memo from the Board's industrial relations department set out various recent wage settlements which averaged over ten percent. Within this memo the most comparable settlements, i.e. those affecting public sector workers, were British Rail workers who had received between

[25] Source: Wilberforce, p.4

[26] Source: British Labour Statistics; NCB Reports and Accounts; Department of Employment Gazette, December 1971; Barratt Brown, M., *What Really Happened to the Coal Industry? The background to the miners' strike*, (The Institute for Workers Control, Pamphlet no.31), (Nottingham, 1972), Table 7, p.18

[27] Source: Wilberforce, p.5

thirteen and sixteen percent, Post Office engineers thirteen percent, London Transport maintenance workers eight percent, local government white collar workers eight percent, teachers ten percent, and Health Service workers eight-and-a-half percent.[28] A further NCB memo circulated during the strike noted that London dockers had received between six and seven percent and that most of the recent settlements had been between seven and eight percent (i.e. within the N-1 norm). However agricultural workers received nine-and-a-half percent, and the lowest grade water supply workers over eleven percent.[29] The DTI also considered the issue of comparative wage settlements and had received conflicting information concerning the appropriate level for a settlement. In line with N-1 the DTI noted that gas workers accepted a seven-and-a-half percent wage deal, which was 'less than the offer made to the miners immediately before the strike', and that power workers had received seven-and-three-quarters percent. However they acknowledged press reports that the average manual worker was earning £30.93 per week in October 1971, over ten percent up on the previous year, and that this strengthened the miners' case, since it showed that the average manual worker earned as much as the highest paid miner.[30] On the same day, Cabinet minutes noted that Chrysler had increased its offer to six thousand five hundred striking car workers to twenty percent over eighteen months, equivalent to an annual increase of about fourteen percent.[31] The *Financial Times* political editor raised the issue of the validity of the miners' case whilst warning of the dangers of ignoring it, noting: 'people have an uneasy feeling that there is something wrong with a system in which people who are working in conditions of extreme discomfort and some danger down the pits should be paid less than production-line motor workers, dockers, overground electricians and many shorthand typists.'[32]

### 4.4 Wage Inflation and the N-1 Pay Norm

Despite this evidence the Government was determined to maintain its wage limit and during the negotiations the Board's hands were tied by N-1, making

[28] TNA: COAL31/416, Recent Important Wage Settlements, 8 September 1971
[29] TNA: COAL31/383, Recent Settlements Affecting Basic Rates, (undated, c. January 1972)
[30] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/12, 25 January; PRCS/20, 3 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/23, 7 February 1972
[31] TNA: CAB128/50/6, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 6, 03 February 1972
[32] *Financial Times*, 21 January 1972. See footnote 8, p.98

conciliation impossible. Against this background the miners' claim was not discussed on its own merits, but rather in terms of its effect on other public-sector wage claims and of the Government's overall policy, and Heath was prepared to confront the miners rather than breach N-1. The Government was not only aware of the risk of a strike, but saw it as a necessary move in defence of what it believed to be a crucial element of its overall economic strategy.[33] Early in the second week, the Cabinet was concerned that, whilst accepting a degree of concession to the miners would become necessary, it did not want this to appear to have been won too easily for fear that this would damage the Government's progressive reduction in pay awards by encouraging others to seek above inflation settlements.[34] The miners' 1971 claim confronted a settlement limit of between seven and eight percent against a retail price index of over nine percent.[35]

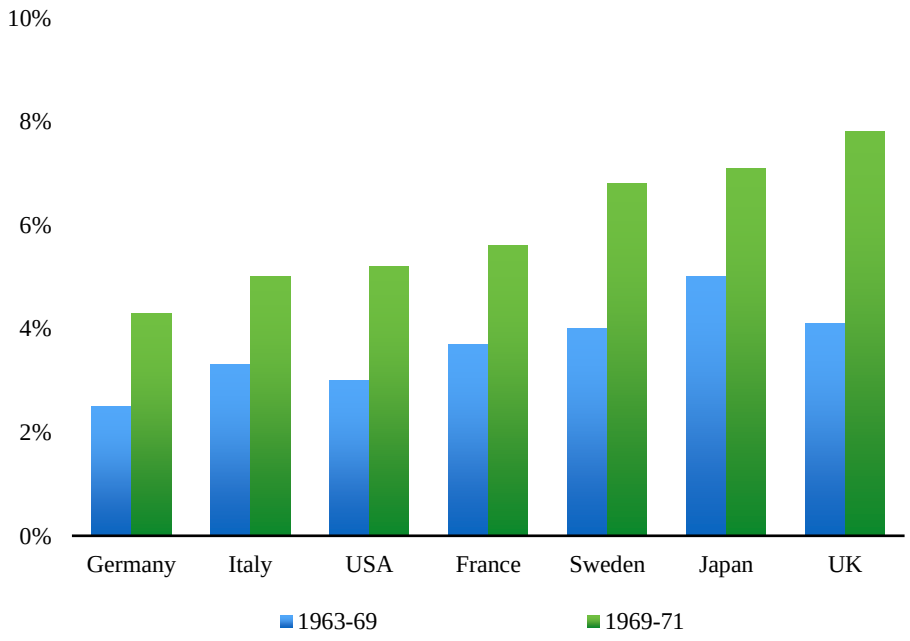
In an internal review of the wage negotiations prepared for Heath in March 1972 it was noted that the NCB had warned, during summer 1971, that an attempt to negotiate an eight percent settlement was likely to precipitate a strike, but the Government had then initially tried to impose a seven percent limit with the possibility of holding the settlement to seven-and-a-half percent. The NCB subsequently 'strongly requested' a higher negotiating limit and the Ministerial Committee on Pay noted on 5 October that for the Government 'the risks of standing firm were very great' and that a strike could drag on for many months with incalculable political and economic consequences. The review also made the point that Ministers did not sufficiently appreciate the 'moral' strength of the miners' case until very late in the day but that given their preoccupation with maintaining N-1 it is doubtful that they would have regarded the miners' claim as sufficiently compelling to justify a breach of the pay ceiling in any case.[36] The Government was further determined to hold its position against the miners given the prospect of simultaneous strikes in three connected sectors - coal, gas and electricity. Thus, at the outset its key aim was to maintain N-1 against pending negotiations in the gas and electricity industries.[37]

[33] TNA: PREM 15/984, Note, 'Coalmining', Barnes to Carr, 6 January 1972
[34] TNA: CAB128/50/3, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 2, 18 January 1972
[35] Godley, W.A.H., 'Inflation in the United Kingdom', in Krause, L.B. & Salant, W.S., (Eds), *Worldwide Inflation: Theory and Recent Experience*, (Washington DC, 1977) p.454
[36] TNA: PREM 15/986, Report on Strike, Trend, 9 March 1972
[37] TNA: CAB128/49/63, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 14 December 1971; CAB128/50/2, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 11 January 1972

The day after the strike began, the *Financial Times* set out a comparison of wage increases for the world's leading economies, which showed that the trend which was apparent in the UK was similar to that experienced in other leading economies, and that it was not simply the result of UK domestic policy or militant trade unions as had been argued. The article cited OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) figures for annual percentage increases in hourly/weekly earnings in 1969-71 for selected leading economies compared with corresponding increases in 1963-69, and considered the fact that consumer prices had also seen an accelerated upswing in 1969-71 across the same economies (see Figs 4.1 & 4.2). The author reasoned that:

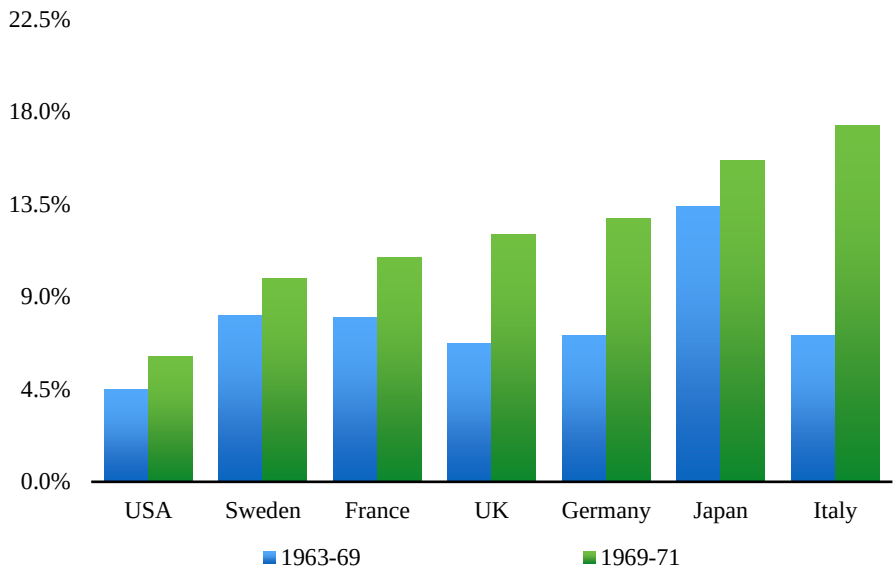
> If the sudden appearance of militant union leaders in the UK were the cause, then similar characters must have simultaneously and unpredictably appeared in these other countries. In sober fact, it is clear that some powerful world-wide economic force must have been operating… Whether prices or wages were the operative cause, there is no doubt of the simultaneous upswing as a world movement in 1969-71.[38]

**Fig.4.1. Comparison of Rise in Average Weekly Earnings of Some Leading Economies, 1963-69 & 1969-71.**[39]




[38] *Financial Times*, 10 January 1972
[39] Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, cited in *Financial Times*, 10 January 1972

**Fig.4.2. Comparison of Rise in Consumer Prices of Some Leading Economies, 1963-69 & 1969-71.**[40]




In the earlier period in the UK, the Retail Price Index rose from 2.1% in April 1963 to 5.5% in April 1969, which, whilst more than doubling, kept the RPI within the relatively stable zone that had held for a decade and a half. However, the RPI then rose sharply over the following two years reaching 9.4% by April 1971.[41] This rise was in common with many of the leading economies and has been attributed to the boon of post-war reconstruction coming to an end and the hegemonic position of the USA being eroded leading to increasing synchronisation in economic fluctuations globally. The accelerated upswing in worldwide consumer prices and attendant wage levels thus marked an important break in the post-war economic experience and an end to the seemingly permanent path of rising prosperity and full employment. This challenged the dominant Keynesian economic model and pushed the Phillips Curve of the relationship between inflation and wages outwards such that both models were reassessed and adapted over the next period as the RPI rose above 20%.[42] Darlington and Lyddon point to the diminishing rate of profits as the 'world-wide economic force' cited by the FT, and note 'the increasing politicisation of industrial relations from the mid-1960s as governments tried to find solutions to

[40] Source: *Financial Times*, 10 January 1972
[41] Office of National Statistics, accessed on 29 October 2019 at https://www.ons.gov.uk
[42] Alford, B.W.E., *British economic performance 1945-1975*, (Cambridge, 1995), pp.1-3:

companies' squeezed profit margins, low economic growth, balance of payments crises, and rising inflation rates.'[43]

### 4.5 Perception of Unfairness

The Government's inconsistent application of N-1 was highlighted during the dispute in relation to the large rises received previously by MPs and the Civil List, which were outside of the pay norm limit. These rises were large in both percentage and absolute terms and served to underline miners' low wages and their perceived unfair treatment by the Government. During the parliamentary debates on the strike Mr. Lewis (Labour) noted that Parliament had been discussing whether £9 per week (£468 per annum) was too much of an increase for the miners but that some ministers would receive annual increases of between £5,000 and £6,000, and in addition ministers received an increase in their allowance from £1,250 to £3,000.[44] Lord Balogh (Labour) said that the Government's 'yammering' about the miners' excessive demands showed 'a peculiar and a louche priority of values', and called it: 'monstrous to enact tax laws which increase the top £50,000 salary by £6,803… and then to turn round and ask for restraint by people who hazard their life and health to get the country's domestic energy and see their standards steadily eroded.'[45] Mr. Joseph Kinsey (Conservative) speaking in Parliament just prior to the strike, pointed to the lack of even-handedness in this regard, and questioned: 'the strategy of the Government in introducing an increase of this amount while asking the rest of the country to take lesser pay rises?'[46] The *Financial Times* political editor drew attention to the discrepancy between the approach taken in determining MPs' salaries and that being applied in the case of miners' wages. He quoted from the report of the committee that determined MP's salaries, which had stated that 'the determination of an appropriate level of remuneration must in the end be a matter of judgment' and had therefore arrived at salary levels which 'fairly reflect the very heavy responsibilities carried by Ministers and importance of their role in the eyes of the nation.' Thus, on the one hand an 'arbitrary judgment of the "worth" of a job is accepted whereas in the case of the miners it is over-ridden by

[43] Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.7
[44] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 cc.349-51
[45] HL Deb, 31 January 1972, vol.327 cc.639-40
[46] HC Deb, 6 December 1971, vol.827 c.955

other considerations.'[47] A leaflet produced by the South Wales NUM during the dispute made a similar point in stating: 'The British Miners - are entitled to a fair wage... Her Majesty has been given 100% increase in her income, Members of Parliament 46%, the Government Ministers 50%.'[48]

The perception of an unfair approach by the Government to the issue of benefits and expenses was further highlighted over the question of supplementary benefits and pickets' expenses. The Government sought to apply financial pressure on striking miners and the NUM, by restricting the amount that pickets were allowed to receive in food and travel allowances. During the second week of the strike, the NUM confirmed that it was giving pickets who travelled away from their home town up to £2 a day towards local travel and food. The Department of (Health &) Social Security (DHSS)[49] argued that some of this at least should be considered when assessing supplementary benefit for the miner's family, though the deduction might have to be a small one, since very little of this amount will actually have been available to support his family. It considered £2 excessive for food and travel alone and that a reasonable figure for two meals away from home 'by a manual worker's standard' would be £1 (when compared to the 75p allowed for a junior civil servant for lunch, which included an allowance for home saving.) A reasonable figure for local travel and minor incidental expenses was deemed to be 25p, and it therefore decided that a flat rate deduction of £1.25 per day would be made to arrive at a net income for assessment purposes (see Table 4.3).[50] The DHSS concluded that this would make it 'very difficult for the wife and children', and told the NUM that it could make 'such heavy cuts' unnecessary either by the NUM giving less than the proposed £2 or by keeping pickets on duty for no more than two or three days at a time. If they refused then they would have to tell the pickets how the payments would be treated. The NUM subsequently decided to pay pickets no more than £1.25 per day with the effect of a nil amount being set against the normal supplementary benefit entitlement.[51]

[47] *Financial Times*, 21 January 1972
[48] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.18
[49] Both DSS and DHSS are used in the sources
[50] TNA: CAB128/50/3, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 2, 18 January; LAB77/84, Notes for Carr on Payments to Pickets, 17 January; DHSS Note, Payment of Supplementary Benefit to pickets, 19 January 1972
[51] TNA: LAB77/84, DHSS Note, Payment of Supplementary Benefit to pickets, 19 January; Letter, Wendt to Holland, 20 January 1972

**Table 4.3. DHSS Calculation for Deductions to Supplementary Benefit.**[52]

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Picket paid £2 per day for seven days | | | £14.00 |
| deduct 7 x £1.25 | £8.75 | | |
| 'Disregard'[53] of £1 | £1.00 | - | £ 9.75 |
| Amount to be set off against benefit the following week | | | £ 4.25 |
| | | | |
| Typical amounts of benefit if rent of £3.00 is assumed: | | | |
| Man and wife and 1 child | | | £ 5.35 |
| Man and wife and 2 children | | | £ 7.35 |
| Man and wife and 3 children | | | £ 9.35 |

**Table 4.4. Supplementary Benefits Paid During the Strike (£)**.[54]

| Week ended | Wives & dependents | Single Men |
|---|---|---|
| 11 January 1972 | 600 | - |
| 18 January 1972 | 68,607 | 21 |
| 25 January 1972 | 969,047 | 3,049 |
| 1 February 1972 | 891,157 | 21,761 |
| 8 February 1972 | 920,659 | 31,709 |
| 15 February 1972 | 971,158 | 35,749 |
| **Total** | **3,821,228** | **91,289** |

## 4.6 Private Negotiations

At a coal industry function on 3 January Gormley told Ezra that the gap between their respective positions 'was very much smaller than the press supposed' and so Ezra arranged to meet Gormley and Daly the following day. Before the meeting Scargill, then a junior official on the Yorkshire NEC, warned: 'There must be no sell out, otherwise the miners will never forgive the leadership of this Union.'[55] Gormley had a discussion with Ezra, after Daly had left the meeting, and suggested two possible areas of movement: either by taking the claim to

[52] Source: TNA: LAB77/84, DHSS Note, Payment of Supplementary Benefit to pickets, 19 January 1972

[53] The 'disregard' of £1 was itself a reduction from the previous £4.35, and had been reduced under the Social Security Act 1971. It is discussed further in Chapter Ten

[54] Source: CPA: CRD/B/15/1, FPC(72)4, Wilberforce Report files

[55] *Morning Telegraph*, 4 January 1972, cited in Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.217

arbitration; or by an offer improved in three respects - an extra two or three days holiday during 1972, a productivity scheme, and that the numbers eligible for a £2 increase should be extended to all those covered by the day wage agreement (the lower paid) with the effect of bringing the increase to 7.83%, i.e. that it should be increased in such a way as to make the overall settlement appear higher.[56]

Carr and Davies discussed Ezra's report of the meeting and agreed that Gormley appeared to be seeking a way of avoiding a strike and that the issue at stake was therefore just how much extra would need to be offered to persuade the 'middleground' of the NEC to turn against strike action. They believed that the NUM were not really prepared for a strike - it had not set up an organisation to conduct the strike and had not been able to gain support from other unions - and that this suggested a marked reluctance within the membership for a strike. Consequently, Carr felt that the Government had two options, either to get a settlement at eight percent without a strike or be forced in to a position of eight-and-a-half to nine percent after a month's strike. He feared that if Gormley felt that there was more on offer tomorrow, then the NEC would be looking for even more by the weekend and therefore it was better to delay a decision on the package until nearer the strike date. Davies communicated the Government's preferred negotiating position to Ezra setting out its hope of getting the NEC to agree to a settlement below eight percent.[57] The following day, 5 January, the Board put forward its final offer at 7.9%, i.e. just within the N-1 limit, which represented an increase of between £1.90 and £2.00 for adults, with comparable increases for juveniles. The offer also included five extra holidays and discussions on productivity bonuses, and it urged reference to the National Reference Tribunal (NRT) if informal talks were unproductive. Gormley recommended acceptance of the offer but the NEC rejected it by twenty-three votes to two.[58] Students from London School of Economics (LSE) attending the subsequent picket line at Battersea power station noted the miners' distrust of the NUM leadership, and of Gormley in particular, and made reference to his meeting with Ezra: 'They're all very cynical about the N.U.M. - "if you're fighting

[56] TNA: PREM15/984, Teleprinter Messages, No10 to Chequers, 3 & 5 January; LAB77/84, Meeting Notes, Carr and Davies, 4 January 1972
[57] TNA: LAB77/84, Meeting Notes, Carr and Davies, 4 January 1972
[58] TNA: CAB128/50/5 Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 27 January 1972; McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) pp.202-3; Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.217

someone, you couldn't sit down and drink sherry with them." There is a real fear that "Gormless" will sell out, and also a certainty that if he tried to, it would lead to much more direct militancy, and possibly a refusal to accept the settlement.'[59]

### 4.7 Government Intervention

In concert with Heath's 'quiet revolution' the Government hoped not to be obliged to intervene directly in negotiations with the NUM on a pay settlement, but rather wanted N-1 to be applied and for the Government to be able to publicly distance itself from intervention whilst exerting a tight control over the NCB's negotiating position. Carr stated that he intended to follow the procedure adopted in the previous year's postal strike and invite both sides to see him on 7 January to inform himself of their position. He expected the gulf between them to be too wide to bridge but wanted to head off public criticism that the Government were not showing proper concern for a resolution to the dispute.[60] The NUM refused a meeting with the NCB at the Department of Employment and on 11 January Carr reported to Cabinet that negotiations between the NUM and NCB had broken down and that the NUM had refused the industry's arbitration machinery. Cabinet then agreed that:

> The Government should appear neither over anxious about the strike nor indifferent to promoting a settlement. So far as possible they should avoid becoming directly involved in a confrontation with the miners and should leave the day-to-day handling of developments to the NCB. But it must be their firm objective to secure that the ultimate resumption of work would be on the basis of concessions no greater than those on offer to the miners before the strike.[61]

There was a widespread belief that the miners were in dispute directly with the Government who were directing the negotiations behind the scenes or were at the least imposing an upper limit to the settlement via N-1. A *Financial Times* article about Gormley on the eve of the strike stated that: 'he sees the miners' dispute as a battle with the Government: he is convinced, not without some justification, that but for the Government rigid insistence on its 7 to 8 per cent. "going rate"

[59] LSE: *Beaver*, No.116, 17 February 1972, p.5
[60] TNA: CAB130/553, GEN72(72), Ministerial Committee (MC) Coalminers' Strike, 1st Meeting, 6 January 1972
[61] TNA: CAB/128/50/2, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 11 January 1972

for pay rises, a compromise could have been reached.'[62] This viewpoint was backed by the Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary, Harold Lever, during the parliamentary debate in the Commons on 18 January, when he stated that:

> The Government have not attempted to influence negotiations from a sense of responsibility and a helpful and constructive attitude. They have attempted nothing less than a diktat on the Coal Board and the miners as to the limits of any advance that can be made in the miners' wages... Everybody knows that the ceiling on the advance offered to the miners by the Board has been fixed by the Government.[63]

LSE students on the picket at Battersea power station reported a recurring theme of their discussions with the miners that it was not the Coal Board they were fighting but the Government.[64] Miner's wife, Tina Dogherty, also explained with whom she believed the miners were actually in struggle: 'To me it was the Government. I don't think the Coal Board had anything to do with it... Mr Heath says never to Mr Ezra. Miners didna' fight the Coal Board. Miners fought the Government.'[65] The miners were also upset that the Government, despite their intervention, were not seeking to resolve the dispute and were disparaging of the miners' plight. South Wales NUM general secretary, Dai Francis observed that: 'you had the Prime Minister after three weeks of the miners' strike casting them aside and saying "Let them stew": But within another three weeks he sent for us'.[66] These comments make clear that it was a secret to no-one that the Government were orchestrating the negotiations behind the scenes, and were dictating the terms and strategy under which the Board could operate.

### 4.8 Arbitration

Throughout the dispute the NCB consistently promoted arbitration as a means of resolution, but both the NUM and the Government held contradictory positions on the issue with the latter in particular using it as means to sway public opinion. Most miners were generally suspicious of arbitration feeling that it favoured the employer and invariably led to lower settlements, and certainly lower than their

[62] *Financial Times*, 8 January 1972
[63] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.242
[64] LSE: *Beaver*, No.116, 17 February 1972, p.5
[65] LB: MS4000/2/152/3, 'Saltley Gate' Actuality transcripts (Actuality), Tina Dogherty, miner's wife, Warwickshire
[66] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.20, Dai Francis, general secretary, South Wales NUM

claim. The Government conversely were reluctant to accept arbitration believing that it would lead to a higher settlement than they were prepared to offer, but nevertheless publicly blamed the NUM for refusing to accept it. Given the gulf between the respective starting positions both opinions were in fact correct. On 2 January the *Guardian* reported the NEC's expectation that the NCB would offer arbitration, noting that voluntary arbitration was open to either party, but that the union leaders felt that they should wait until the strike was under way,[67] presumably believing that this would strengthen their position. Gormley however privately offered arbitration to Ezra following the 4 January meeting he and Daly had with the NCB.[68] Carr and Davies met on the same day and agreed that arbitration was likely to lead to a high settlement (perhaps ten to eleven percent), which Carr was reportedly very anxious to avoid, and so they told the NCB not to offer arbitration until later in the week.[69] However, in submitting its final offer the following day the Board offered to take the dispute to the NRT since a strike would necessarily lead to some form of arbitration. The full NEC rejected this offer believing that it would result in their getting a lower settlement with Daly noting that, in line with other trade unions, the NUM no longer had confidence that an arbitration tribunal would secure an unbiased hearing because Government directions had undermined the principle of free negotiation.[70] It is not clear whether Daly was in disagreement with Gormley or whether he, as general secretary, was merely reflecting the wishes of the NEC. During the first week of the strike the Department of Employment continued to recommend a hard line internally and that in particular there should be 'no attempt to set up any form of arbitration and no move towards an offer which offered more in total than the Board's final offer', i.e. that it should remain within the N-1 level.[71] The Government, however, continued to give the impression that it was only the miners who were refusing arbitration. This was highlighted during the Lords debate when Conservative peer Lord Harvey of Prestbury, begged the miners to go to arbitration, stating:

> At the end of the day, it will be difficult to get these people to talk. Why cannot they go to arbitration? They are a strong body of fair-minded men. If there is a case - and I think there is for many grades of workers - surely

[67] *Guardian*, 2 January 1972
[68] TNA: PREM15/984, Teleprinter message, No.10 to Chequers, 5 January 1972
[69] TNA: LAB77/84, Meeting Notes, Carr and Davies, 4 January; PREM15/984, Teleprinter message from No10 to Chequers, 5 January 1972
[70] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, pp.202-3 & 217, and author note p.232
[71] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January 1972

> arbitration would put their case right. I beg the miners to see the light in this direction.[72]

### 4.9 Withdrawal of the Offer

On the eve of the strike Ezra warned the NUM that if the Board's final offer were rejected and the strike were to go ahead 'an entirely new situation will arise, and we shall be bound to withdraw all offers.'[73] The NCB subsequently withdrew its previous offers and Davies, speaking during the Commons debate the following week, gave a rationale for this action:

> the Board withdrew its offer on the grounds that the financial situation of the Board must inevitably be damaged by the strike, that it could not expect therefore to be in a position to sustain the latest offer from such a worsened position, and that when the parties resumed their contact - as they inevitably must - the situation would have to be approached in the new conditions which would then be prevailing.[74]

The following day, 19 January, TUC general secretary Vic Feather chaired a meeting between the NUM and the NCB. The Government had not discouraged the NCB from attending but did not yet consider it opportune for Carr to offer his department's conciliation services.[75] Feather reported back to Carr that he had found attitudes hard on both sides, particularly following the NCB's withdrawal of its offer. With respect to arbitration Feather rejected the idea of a Court of Inquiry as 'fatal and ill-advised' as there was unlikely to be a resumption of work whilst it sat and no guarantee that its recommendations would be accepted.[76] Carr then agreed to meet both parties separately on 21 January and his departmental briefing notes for these meetings expose the process to be more for public consumption than a sincere attempt to resolve the dispute. The department believed that it was too soon to be forced into a true reconciliation role, and thus the stated objective was that:

[72] HL Deb 31, January 1972, vol.327 c.635
[73] *Guardian*, 8 January 1972
[74] HC Deb, 18 January 1972, vol.829 c.233
[75] TNA: CAB128/50/3, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 2, 18 January 1972
[76] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and Feather, 19 January; CAB128/50/4, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 20 January 1972

> The impression must be given that the meeting is a serious and purposeful attempt to explore the current position and attitudes of the Union… After both meetings, the desired outcome is - however regrettably - that the attitudes of both parties is such that no useful practical steps can at present be taken to resolve the deadlock.

The document also advised that the Government should push for a joint meeting under Carr's chairmanship, noting that arguments for this included: that it 'would help to confirm the position of deadlock', since there was little risk of any movement; that 'the public would look for a joint meeting'; and that a 'joint meeting for 24 January, with a statement to the House the following day, would freeze the position through next week.' The argument against a meeting was 'a risk, however slight, of movement by the parties.'[77] This brief exposes a rather cynical approach by a Government more concerned for public opinion than dispute resolution, and also a belief that it was in control of events. Prior to the 21 January meetings Ezra told Carr privately that the withdrawal of the final offer had hardened attitudes and that he was not happy about the decision to announce the withdrawal. Carr replied that he should not worry about this, that it was the right decision, and that extremists in the union were determined to have a strike.[78] This indicates that the initiative in announcing the withdrawal of the offer came for the Government rather than from the NCB, though Davies appeared to have laid the blame with the NCB two days earlier. At the 21 January meeting the NEC were unanimous that a Court of Inquiry was no solution and would not get the miners back to work, and that they had completely lost trust in the independence of arbitration. Daly confirmed that the withdrawal of the offer:

> had hardened feelings and led to rejection by an overwhelming majority of his members at large and well attended meetings of the Branches throughout the country. The men were now saying that the Government and the Coal Board had forced them into a strike and they would not come back before they got all they were claiming.[79]

At the end of the following week *The Frost Programme* aired live from Blaen Rhondda miners' social club and several miners taking part confirmed agreement with the views of the NEC in expressing their disillusionment with the arbitration process. Many also voiced their expectation of receiving the full value of their

[77] TNA: LAB77/84, Briefing Notes, Carr meetings with NUM and NCB, 20 January 1972
[78] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and NUM, 21 January 1972
[79] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and NUM, 21 January 1972

wage claim and drew comparisons with the recent increase in MP's pay.[80] The following day, Gormley phoned the NCB to say that, 'during an intensive coalfield', visit he was now having to cope with a growing mood amongst strikers that they are going to settle for nothing, or very little, less than the full claim. He said that he was not encouraging that sort of attitude, but was very worried about it.[81] A few days earlier, at the end of the third week, Carr had suggested to Cabinet that conciliation might have some chance if it were left to the end of the fourth week [*circa* 4 February], because by then the miners might be more disposed to settle and the wage negotiations with the electricity workers would have been resolved, which would put the miners in a more isolated position.[82] Towards the end of the fifth week, Cabinet discussed the form an acceptable wage offer might take at the forthcoming joint meeting of the NCB and NUM. It noted that it was important to secure an offer that was demonstrably reasonable and to make this known as soon as possible in order that, if it were rejected by the NUM, public opinion would appreciate where the responsibility for the continuance of the strike lay, particularly if at the same time power cuts and the general discomfort of the coal shortage were increasingly being felt.[83] These discussions betray a lack of concern, on behalf of the Government, for the ongoing effects of the strike, and also its belief that it was still directing events well beyond the half way point of the strike.

### 4.10 Compromising Proposals

When Feather reported back to Carr on 19 January he proposed adding a 'productivity element' to the settlement.[84] This had been suggested by Gormley privately at his meeting with Ezra two weeks earlier,[85] though at the 21 January meeting between Carr and the NEC, Gormley then said that there needed to be the 'right atmosphere' before productivity could be negotiated and such an atmosphere did not currently exist, and that only a hefty settlement would create it.[86] A productivity scheme based on higher rewards for greater production would

[80] *The Frost Programme*, 30 January, cited in TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/16, 29-30 January 1972
[81] TNA: COAL31/383, Memo, Shephard to Ezra, 31 January 1972
[82] TNA: CAB128/50/5 Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 27 January 1972
[83] TNA: CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February 1972
[84] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and Feather, 19 January 1972
[85] TNA: PREM15/984, Teleprinter message, No10 to Chequers, 5 January 1972
[86] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and NUM, 21 January 1972

favour the Areas in the central coalfield with wider seams, because coal there is comparatively easier to extract making them more productive for the equivalent labour. Thus, the reintroduction of a productivity scheme would undermine the unity amongst miners over the issue of wages, that had been gained under the NPLA, by effectively reintroducing wage differentials. It would consequently also accelerate the closure of the peripheral coalfields, which would appear less productive. This must have been known to both Gormley and Feather, and one can only conclude that this was their motivation for suggesting a productivity element; that is, that they favoured undermining the strength of a united membership, which is less easy to control.

At Feather's meeting with Carr, Feather also stated his belief that both parties wanted to get away from the 'annual confrontation' and suggested that the Government might offer a settlement to the miners covering a period longer than twelve months.[87] Carr brought this issue to Cabinet on 27 January, when he reported that a resolution of the dispute depended 'on the ability of the NCB to make any new proposal appear significantly different' from previous offers, 'though not exceeding [them] in total value'. In particular he felt that higher immediate cash benefits could be conceded in return for a pay settlement which would last for more than twelve months but less than two years, 'an arrangement which would have the incidental advantage of changing the normal autumn date of negotiations to the spring or summer', when coal was less in demand and therefore the union's negotiating position weaker.[88] Feather must have been aware of this 'advantage' of the extended settlement period that he had suggested.

Heath met Maudling and Carr on 7 February and they decided that Carr should invite both parties for talks on 9 February, when a State of Emergency would also be declared. Carr thought a settlement unlikely and that the main purpose of the talks would be to influence public opinion, and possibly also to float the idea that any offer might run for a longer period, say eighteen months, which 'would have the advantage, from the point of view of the NCB and the Government that the next round of pay negotiations would take place in the early summer.'[89] Having cleared the issue with Ezra, Carr raised it at the subsequent meeting with the

[87] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and Feather, 19 January 1972
[88] TNA: CAB128/50/5 Cabinet Conclusions, Item 4, 27 January 1972
[89] TNA: LAB77/84, Note, Gregson to Angel, re: Heath meeting with Carr and Maudling, 7 February 1972

NUM, and Gormley said that the NEC had not discussed the notion of a larger settlement over a longer period and that he did not therefore have authority to agree, but that in principle he personally was not averse to such a deal, though it would need to be accompanied by a higher cash figure. The Department of Employment calculated, somewhat hopefully, that a suggested settlement figure of £80 million, over a period of eighteen months from the date of resumption of work, or from 1 February, would be just within the N-1 limit. If, however, it were backdated to 1 November it would be about a ten percent settlement.[90]

It some senses, it seems remarkable that two high level trade union leaders - the general secretary of the TUC and the president of the NUM - should suggest and promote an eighteen-month settlement and also a productivity scheme, both of which would undermine the concurrent and future negotiating position of the NUM. However, this manoeuvring is in fact in accordance with a contention of this thesis, that one of the primary roles of union leaders is to compromise the demands of the workers to the interests of the employer. Following the meetings, further negotiations took place and the Board then made a further offer, for eighteen months from resumption of work, of £2.50 rising to £3.00 for surface workers (currently £18), £3.50 for underground workers (currently £19) and £2.75 for face workers under the NPLA (currently £30). The NEC rejected the offer but lowered its initial claim of £8, £9 and £5 respectively to £6, £7 and £4 to run from 1 November 1971. The Board said that it was not able to contemplate such a settlement and the negotiations ended. A Court of Inquiry to settle the dispute was then proposed.[91] The Inquiry subsequently suggested that a productivity scheme should be devised, and recommended a sixteen month settlement running from 1 November 1971, though not ostensibly in order to move the negotiating date to the summer, but rather because by then four months of the negotiation period had already elapsed, and therefore it would allow for everyone to focus on increasing productivity rather than resuming negotiations in a few months' time.[92]

[90] TNA: PREM15/984, Meeting Notes, Carr and NUM, 9 February; LAB77/84, Note, Jamieson to Holland, 9 February 1972
[91] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.206
[92] Wilberforce, pp.11-12

### 4.11 Wilberforce Inquiry

On 11 February Carr appointed a Court of Inquiry under the Chairmanship of Lord Wilberforce (the Wilberforce Inquiry),[93] which was tasked with inquiring into the causes and circumstances of the dispute. The Cabinet's own internal review later criticised the decision to leave this appointment so late.[94] Public hearings took place on 15 and 16 February with key representations by Daly, Ezra and Campbell Adamson for the Confederation of British Industries (CBI). The TUC were invited to give evidence but did not think it necessary to do so. Daly pointed to the harsh working conditions in the mines and the isolation of many mining communities and noted the miners' cooperation in introducing mechanisation and in the 'streamlining' of production, i.e. in undertaking pit closures and redundancies, which had led to an increase in productivity. He noted that both the NCB and the NUM had welcomed the NPLA but that miners had suffered a relative loss in earnings compared to other industrial workers.

The Inquiry noted that it was difficult to determine the precise dimensions of the relative decline due to varying measures and base dates, but that there was no conclusion other than that there had been a serious fall in the relative position of miners. It observed that this constituted an 'exceptional situation' which could only have occurred with 'exceptional restraint' on behalf of the miners, and that it seemed clear that 'too much was asked of men as the price of the new wages structure.' It noted the inability of the Board to meet the miners' claim since its financial objective was to break even each year and it had a concurrent deficit of £35 million, and accepted that a proportion of its inability to pay derived from its interest liabilities, but that a maximum of £33 million of the £100 million claim could be gained by writing off its outstanding capital debt. It reasoned that the claim could be financed by raising the price of coal though a sufficient rise might lead to a loss of one third of the Board's market with attendant contraction and job losses, particularly in the peripheral coalfields. If this were unacceptable then the Government would have to pay as the Court considered it unreasonable to ask miners' wages to be held down to finance uneconomic operations. It also

[93] Wilberforce Inquiry, Cmnd. 4903, February 1972
[94] TNA: PREM15/986, Negotiations Review, Trend to Heath, 9 March 1972

considered that the miners' claim should be given exceptional national (or 'special') treatment.[95]

**Table 4.5. Summary of Court of Inquiry's Wage Recommendations, (weekly).**[96]

| | | Previous Minimum | Addition | New Minimum |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Face Workers** | NPLA | £30.00 | | £34.50 |
| | 3rd Daywage | | | |
| | Grade A | £30.00 | £4.50 | £34.50 |
| | Grade B | £24.92½ | | £29.42½ |
| | Grade C | £23.20 | | £27.70 |
| **Underground** | 1955 Daywage | | | |
| | Craftsmen | £19.40 | £6.00 | £25.40 |
| | Non-Craftsmen | £19.00 | | £25.00 |
| **Surface** | Craftsmen | £18.35 | £5.00 | £23.35 |
| | Non-Craftsmen | £18.00 | | £23.00 |

The Court recognised two distinct elements to the miners' claim. 1) a *periodic increase,* to take account of the cost of living and other considerations. 2) an *adjustment factor*, to correct a distortion or trend due for correction.[97] It recommended increases of £5 per week for surface workers (27.8% rise), £6 per week for underground workers (31.6%), and £4.50 per week for face workers (15%), with all payments backdated to 1 November 1971 and to run until 28 February 1973 (see Table 4.5).

The NEC initially voted down the Wilberforce proposals. The Areas voting against were the traditionally wage-militant, CP-controlled, Areas of Scotland, South Wales and Kent along with North Derbyshire, which had led the calls for a change to Rule 43, and the central coalfield Areas of Yorkshire and Nottingham, whose wages had suffered most under the NPLA transition period.[98] The Court left many unresolved issues for example: the payment of the adult wage at age eighteen; the length of time over which rent arrears could be paid; how holiday pay should be calculated; whether miners were entitled to guaranteed wages during the overtime ban; what should be done about insurance payments not paid

[95] Wilberforce, pp.1-8; McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.208
[96] Source: Wilberforce, p.13
[97] Wilberforce, p.9
[98] TNA: PREM15/986, NEC Wilberforce votes, 20 March 1972

during the strike. The NUM therefore did not immediately accept its recommendations as final.[99]

On 18 February Cabinet met to discuss the NEC's rejection of the Wilberforce report, which had been published that morning. The Government agonised over the courses of action then open to it and to the NUM, in which the issue of public opinion was paramount. Heath suggested that he could try to persuade the NEC that the NUM would lose public sympathy if it maintained its intransigent attitude, and Cabinet also hoped to prevent the members of the NEC 'from taking a final decision until they had been subjected to the full force of public opinion.' However, Cabinet deemed it impracticable to keep the NEC in play in this manner, and the alternatives therefore were either to negotiate further concessions beyond the Wilberforce recommendations or to stand firm. Either course was fraught with public perception difficulties. If the Government stood firm then the full weight of public opinion might not persuade the miners to concede, and even the use of servicemen and volunteers to distribute supplies or the use of imported coal, which might give a few weeks respite, would be over in a very short time at which point the Government would be forced to concede defeat. Public opinion would then censure them even more severely than if they were to negotiate with the miners immediately. On the other hand, it was inconceivable that, on the very day that the Wilberforce report was published, the Government should acquiesce in concessions going substantially beyond the Court's recommendations. To do so would give the miners so clear a victory that the Government's authority would be severely damaged and a fresh mandate might be required. 'To fight and lose would be bad enough; not to fight at all would be even worse.'[100] However, further talks on these issues were then held between the Government/NCB and the NUM and additional concessions were obtained. When the NEC then accepted the proposals, the right-wing called for an immediate end to picketing, which was agreed by fourteen votes to eleven though picketing continued in some places.[101] A ballot on acceptance of the settlement was carried out on 23 February and received a majority of over ninety-six percent in favour. Miners subsequently returned to work on 28 February.[102]

[99] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.208
[100] TNA: CAB128/50/9, Cabinet Conclusions, 18 February 1972
[101] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) pp.200-203
[102] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.208

## 4.12 Conclusion

This chapter considered the Heath Government's introduction of the N-1 Norm as a means to control public sector wage inflation whilst proclaiming a desire to take on the public sector and contain strike activity. In this, it confronted a section of the industrial working class that was ready for such a confrontation following a period of pit closures and wage restraint that had caused significant frustration and unrest. It has shown that miners' wages were low in comparison to other public sector and manual workers, and that their wage claim was an attempt to redress this imbalance. It has also demonstrated that British inflation levels and wage settlements were comparable to those of other leading economies, and that the conditions pertaining in Britain were not untypical despite suggestions that militant union leaders were the cause. The chapter showed that the NUM's wage claim confronted the Government's self-imposed limit on the level of public sector wage settlements, which was inconsistently applied and took no account of the merits of the miners' case. The Government were shown to be aware that their imposition of the pay norm would provoke a strike, and that they not only ignored this danger but actively sought such an outcome and were dismissive of the plight of the miners and adamant about the merits of their own strategy in the belief that they were in control of the dispute. The chapter has demonstrated that the Heath Government's 'quiet revolution' took the form of a professed desire to remain detached from the negotiations, but this was shown to be merely a public relations exercise since the it actually dictated the terms and the time-frame, within which the NCB could negotiate. The withdrawal of the NCB's final offer was a decision imposed on the NCB by the Government, despite the NCB's bearing the blame, and it hardened the resolve of the miners to get their full claim. The issue of arbitration was another in which the Government's public pronouncements were at odds with its actions, and it was used in an attempt to swing public opinion against the miners. The chapter exposed the private negotiations undertaken by the leaders of both the NUM and the TUC in seeking to resolve the dispute on terms less favourable to the miners, showing the real role of trade unions not as defenders of their members but as liaisons between the employer and the workers, with a vested interest in supporting the employer.

# Chapter 5

## Picketing of Coal Stocks

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the picketing of coal stocks during the strike, to prevent their movement from colliery pit-heads, opencast sites and depots, and to stop the transport of fuel to and from power stations and to large industrial coal users such as steelworks. It does not concern the picketing of officials and clerical workers, which is discussed in Chapter Six. It will consider the NUM's strategy of halting all movement of coal, and also the organisation of picketing, the ground for which had been laid in the contacts made during the overtime ban. It will assess the extent to which the TUC statement at the beginning of the strike initiated, encouraged, or facilitated picketing away from the collieries and enabled coal movement to be so effectively minimised. The chapter will consider the nature of mobile or 'flying pickets', and of mass picketing, and how this developed during the strike. It will review the divergence between the guidelines on picketing given by the national leadership, and their local, branch-level, interpretation, and show that the decisions on picketing were largely made by strike or liaison committees at branch level and were increasingly at odds with the NEC in that they were more militant and went further than the leadership desired. The weekly assessment of establishments being picketed, and the behaviour of the pickets, is primarily based on weekly telexes sent by the English and Welsh constabularies to, and at the request of, the Home Office,[1] but draws also on the Board's situation reports and the DTI's daily progress reports on the strike.

[1] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English and Welsh Constabularies to Home Office

## 5.2 Picketing Strategy

The preparations undertaken during the overtime ban allowed the miners to hit the ground running when the strike began on 9 January 1972. The strategy was to stop coal production and to restrict the use of existing stocks and, in preparation, the country was divided up and allocated to be picketed by particular mining Areas, for example the Midlands Area (including Kent) was allocated the power stations in London, and the South Wales Area was allocated the south west of England. In Yorkshire, which had a huge number of facilities, responsibility was distributed amongst its Panels: Doncaster – the major Yorkshire power stations; North Yorkshire – the Leeds and Wakefield region and intermediate power stations; South Yorkshire – the steel complexes and coke production plants of Sheffield and Rotherham; and Barnsley – the picketing of the power stations and docks in East Anglia, because Barnsley had spare capacity due to there being few coal-using installations in the Area.[2] Each Area and branch were responsible, via the liaison committees, for recruiting volunteers for picket duty and for developing systems of communication, in particular strike-centres since the collieries themselves were no longer available. In the pit villages, where the majority of the local population were concerned with the colliery, welfare and working men's clubs were used, but in the towns, where miners were in the minority and often spread out amongst the population, certain pubs and clubs were nominated. The liaison committees also investigated the location of the various depots, power stations, docks, rail yards in their Area, to 'feel the ground' and assess the size and type of coal stocks on site, the number of site entrances, in order to plan any potential picketing and, if possible, make initial contact with local trade unionists, particularly from transport unions and power stations.[3]

Turner writes, incorrectly, that 'flying pickets' emerged as a 'new tactic' in this strike,[4] however, flying pickets had been used effectively by miners in unofficial strikes in both 1969 and 1970 and had also been used earlier than these disputes.[5] By the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a proliferation of car ownership amongst miners making mobile picketing easier to organise since it did not rely

[2] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.222
[3] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) pp.122 & 126
[4] Turner, A.W., *Crisis? What Crisis?: Britain in the 1970s*, (London, 2008) p.13
[5] Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) p.49

solely upon the hiring of minibuses or coaches. Miners quickly realised what an effective weapon mobile picketing could be given 'modern motorway communication meant possible mobilisation of different coalfields in united action and covering long journeys in a very short time'.[6] Beckett points to the NUM's lack of funds and the attendant need for a 'brief, aggressive campaign' and that this led to the strategy of focusing on 'pressure points' such as power stations and coal depots.[7]

### 5.3 TUC Statement and National Guidelines

On 10 January the TUC, in response to an NUM appeal for support, expressed solidarity with the miners but decided that since several transport unions were already supporting the miners, there was no need for official TUC instruction to do so. However, it gave assurances that 'members would not pass picket lines' and it was generally agreed that 'it would be helpful if pickets were mounted by the NUM on those places from which they did not want coal to be moved'[8] (this is discussed further in Chapter Eight). Following the TUC statement Daly sent out an instruction to the Area secretaries of the NUM to place pickets at 'coal stock yards, open cast sites, Docks and Power Stations'. The following day he sent a further statement of 'instructions to pickets' stating that: 'The aim of the NUM picket is to prevent the movement of coal and alternative fuels between power stations, coal depots and other coal consumers.' Picket lines 'should therefore be placed at strategic rail and road access points to prevent the movement of coal or alternative fuels'. The statement stressed that picketing should be peaceful, and that other workers not transporting fuel should be allowed to enter the various plants.[9]

On 21 January, Daly issued a further circular setting out national rulings and guidelines. This noted that oil-fired power stations were now taking extra loads following the closures of coal-fired stations, and that deliveries of oil should also

[6] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.28; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.191
[7] Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, (London, 2009) p.64
[8] MRC: TUC Archive, MSS.292D/24.1/5, Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC), Special Meeting, 10 January 1972
[9] MRC: TUC, MSS.292D/253.103/1, Daly to Area Secretaries, Circular AS17/72, 11 January; Instructions to Pickets, 12 January 1972

be stopped, though all equipment, particularly safety equipment, should be allowed through the lines. Twenty-four-hour pickets were to be mounted at all power stations except where firm assurances had been received from local unions that any movement of fuel would be notified. Daly noted that coke supplies to steelworks should also be stopped, and that the only coal allowed to move was that for priority consumers, in order that these supplies were not exhausted; any such movements should be accompanied by pickets to ensure correct delivery. The circular demanded, again, that all picketing should be peaceful and that there should be no provocation whatsoever, and that picket lines should be maintained throughout the strike, even as they become more effective and seemingly unnecessary. The circular allowed for local variation according to the situation, which arguably opened the door to divergence from these guidelines though local branches had already been diverging from national guidelines since the overtime ban.[10]

McCormick alludes to the I.R.Act (discussed further in Chapter Ten), the full provisions of which were soon to become law, in noting that the elaborate instructions issued by Daly were due to the implications of the 'uncertainties arising from changes in the law'.[11] Darlington and Lyddon note that miners in many different areas had been creating their own solutions for several days before Daly issued his instructions, and the national leadership was therefore in fact only responding to the developments in the more militant regions whilst also setting minimum standards for the others.[12] Taylor describes Daly's 12 January statement as one of the most important documents in post-war British politics,[13] which appears to credit the NUM leadership with more of a leading role than is perhaps warranted. He acknowledges, however, that: the strike was led and organised by the membership and their immediate leaders; that the conduct of the strike was in the hands of the Area union branches and the Yorkshire Panels; that the various branches were liaising with one another; and that the organisation and deployment of flying pickets was not under the detailed direction of the official union leadership.[14] The TUC statement therefore encouraged non-mining unions

[10] TNA: COAL78/1906, Daly to Area Secretaries, Circular AS35/72, 21 January 1972
[11] McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) p.204
[12] Lyddon, D., '"Glorious Summer", 1972: the High Tide of Rank and File Militancy', in McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. & Campbell, A., (Eds.), *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79*, (Monmouth, 2007) p.330; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.45
[13] Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) pp.58-9
[14] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.219-22 & 231

to respect the sanctity of the picket lines, or at least sanctioned their recognition, and also aided the divergence between the rank-and-file pickets and the NUM leadership by encouraging miners to place pickets in the most effective places in their locality.

## 5.4 Picketing of Coal Stocks - an Overview

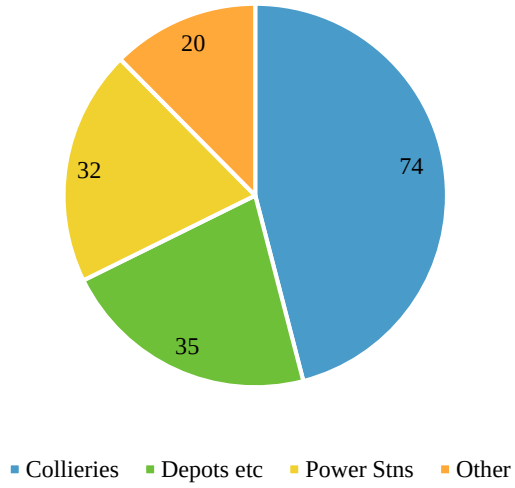
The types of establishment picketed during the strike were primarily those advised by the NUM leadership, as was the generally peaceful approach of most pickets. There was some local divergence from these guidelines, and in particular the miners' attitude, though remaining largely peaceful, grew increasingly frustrated and militant as the strike progressed. The picketing, for the most part, remained small scale or token, that is to say less than twenty pickets on any one picket line, and mostly less than ten. The larger scale picketing increased as the strike progressed, in particular against establishments that persistently defied the miners' appeals. During the first two weeks of the strike collieries remained the establishments most picketed followed by depots then power stations. The following two weeks saw power stations overtake depots with collieries remaining first, though collieries slipped behind both in the fifth week. Though coal production ceased immediately at NCB collieries, they continued to be picketed for two main reasons: to prevent any movement of pit-head coal stocks, except for use by priority consumers (discussed further in Chapter Seven); and to attempt to prevent safety and clerical staff from entering, or to regulate their numbers (discussed further in Chapter Six). It is not always clear from the records whether the former or latter pertains, except where very large numbers of pickets amassed at collieries in which case it seems clear that this was for the latter purpose. In the case of opencast sites, the recorded picketing includes both the opencast mines themselves, but primarily the depots that stored the opencast mined coal; pickets attempted to prevent both the delivery of opencast coal to the depots, and the subsequent release of any coal stocks. Picketing at all other depots was primarily concerned with stopping the removal of fuel, except for use by priority consumers. The term 'depots' covers a host of different establishments, including NCB and privately-owned depots and yards, coke-stocking and coke-washing sites, reclamation sites, merchants' yards and storage quarries. The picketing of power stations was primarily concerned with stopping the delivery

of fuel and later also ignition oil and other supplies such as hydrogen, but the picketing was also used to prevent the transport of fuel out of those power stations that had excess stocks for delivery to those which had a deficit. Picketing at docks and wharves was concerned both with the delivery of imported coal, and with preventing the release of coal previously delivered or stored by coal merchants, who were themselves also picketed to ensure that they only delivered to customers on the priority lists. The miners quite quickly curtailed coal movement around the country, neutralising the stocks held in many depots and power stations, which were consequently unable to be utilised.

## 5.5 Week One: 9 - 16 January 1972

Police telexes for the first week of the strike report peaceful picketing throughout England and Wales in both mining and non-mining areas. No incidents were reported by the various constabularies regarding the movement of coal, and the vast majority of reports used descriptions such as: 'no disorder', 'no violence', 'no disturbance' or 'no intimidation'. Pickets were said to be acting: 'reasonably', 'in an orderly manner', or 'co-operating with the police'.

**Fig.5.1. Types of Establishment Picketed, England & Wales: Week One.**[15]




[15] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 17 January 1972. 'Depots etc' covers all stocking areas including merchants' and railway yards; 'Other' includes steelworks, docks and NCB headquarters

The telexes report that one third of the picket lines had ten or fewer pickets, and that eighty-five percent had below twenty; where they were larger than this, they rarely exceeded twenty-five.[16] The only incidents that arose concerned pickets' attempts to persuade safety and clerical staff to strike. Picketing outside of the coalfield areas took place at centres near to collieries, such as Rawmarsh power station in Sheffield (by South Yorkshire pickets), coal merchants and a depot in Liverpool (by Lancashire pickets), Nechells power station in Birmingham (by Derby pickets), and power stations and depots in London and the Thames estuary (by pickets from Kent, Coventry and Stoke).[17]

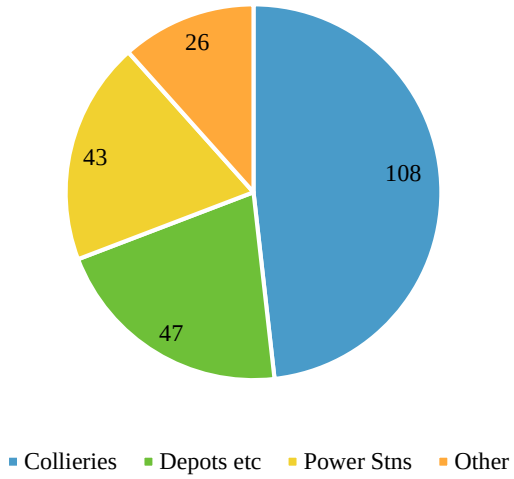
### 5.6 Week Two: 17 - 23 January 1972

During the second week of the strike the police telexes record the majority of the picketing remaining peaceful, though there was a marginal shift in the reporting, with comments on the nature of the pickets slightly moderated to, for example: 'generally peaceful', 'reasonable temper', 'no major disorder'. Dyfed Powys Constabulary reported that the attitude of the miners had hardened somewhat from the previous week. There were a greater number of sites picketed than in week one including private coal depots and reclamation sites, particularly in South Wales. There were also moves towards the picketing of establishments not directly involved in the coal industry, for example large factories, such as British Steel Corporation (BSC) at Smith's Dock in Teesside, Imperial Chemical Industries in Runcorn, Cheshire and Courtaulds in Flint, were all picketed, as were smaller firms such as Bretby Engineering in South Derbyshire and Spencer Steelworks in Gwent.[18] It became apparent to the NEC during the week that power stations were conserving coal by burning extra oil instead. It was therefore decided to disrupt the flow of oil, and miners also began the picketing of flashing (lighting-up) oil to power stations, which in some cases rendered useless the coal supplies they still held.[19] Picket numbers reported in the police telexes remained reasonably small in most areas (thirty-seven percent

[16] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 17 January 1972; Nine of twenty constabularies in Week 1 gave no attributable figures
[17] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Sheffield & Rotherham, Liverpool & Bootle, Birmingham City and Metropolitan Police, 17 January 1972
[18] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Dyfed Powys, Teesside, Chester, Gwynedd, Gwent and Derbyshire, 24 January 1972
[19] KL: KA25/U/Z5, NUM Conference 1972, NEC Report, pp.8-9

with ten or fewer and eighty-four percent with twenty or fewer), but rose in a few areas, some of this quite substantially, and there was a corresponding increase in militancy.[20]

**Fig.5.2. Types of Establishment Picketed, England & Wales: Week Two.**[21]




In the Durham Constabulary area seventy to eighty pickets arrived on Monday at Swalwell opencast depot (up from ten the previous week) to prevent drivers from delivering coal. This appears to have had some success, as the picket numbers dropped to four by the end of the week. Durham also saw a marked increase in militancy at the East Hedley opencast depot where seventy to eighty miners picketed on the Wednesday in an attempt to stop deliveries of coal. The following day another one hundred and twenty miners arrived from the Swalwell area to bolster the picket and placed stones across the entrance to block the roadway. The pickets were reportedly uncooperative until the Chief Superintendent attended and they became more cooperative and dispersed.[22] In Liverpool, Lancashire pickets attempted to prevent coal merchants from supplying coal for non-priority use. This had begun peacefully on a small scale at two sites in week one; however, Martindale's coal merchants in the city centre refused to agree, and the picket numbers there rose to fifty on the Monday of week two. Pickets reportedly pulled sacks of coal off vehicles leaving the yard,

[20] Nine of twenty-two constabularies in Week 2 gave no attributable figures
[21] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 24 January 1972
[22] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 17, 20 & 24 January 1972

which seems to have persuaded the coal merchant to comply with their requests, as just three pickets attended the following day.[23] At the end of the second week pickets clashed with lorry drivers attempting to take coal from depots in Kent and Nottingham, leading the police to make arrests.[24] The increase in militancy by the pickets in these situations reflects a frustration at the lack of success at their initial attempts at peaceful picketing. In addition to pickets stopping the supply and delivery of coal, they also protested establishments that had decided to permanently discontinue using coal. A peaceful demonstration of around one hundred miners was reported at the county council offices in Matlock, Derbyshire against the increasing number of council establishments changing from coal-heating to oil.[25] This was clearly seen as an affront in a mining county, during a strike, in a general situation where coal was losing out to oil and gas.

On the Monday of week two, forty-two pickets from the Barnsley Area established a temporary 'flying picket' headquarters at Norwich Labour Club, with picket numbers rising to around one hundred by the end of the week.[26] There is some discrepancy about these figures, as press reports gave the numbers of pickets in East Anglia as one thousand by the Thursday.[27] The Teesside Constabulary also reported incidents of flying picketing in week two, both in the sense of pickets travelling to other areas but also in the speed and mobile nature of the picketing concerned. Fifty pickets from Whessoe Lodge, arrived at the BSC site at Smith's Dock, they consulted with BSC union officials and then left after just thirty-five minutes. They then immediately went to North Tees power station and repeated the procedure; leaving after thirty-five minutes having consulted the power station superintendent. Four days later twenty pickets returned to the power station staying for forty minutes before leaving.[28] A similar process was reported by West Midlands Constabulary when forty-five pickets from Stoke arrived at Ocker Hill power station leaving after half an hour.[29] The emergence of the use of highly mobile, lightning picketing shows a development of the tactics of flying picketing based on what appeared to be successful locally, and making use of the resources and picket numbers at hand.

[23] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Liverpool & Bootle, 24 January 1972
[24] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[25] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Derbyshire, 24 January 1972
[26] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Norfolk, 24 January 1972
[27] *The Times*, 19 January, *Morning Telegraph*, 21 January, *Morning Star*, 20 January 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.220-1
[28] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Teesside, 17 & 24 January 1972
[29] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, West Midlands, 24 January 1972

In a similar vein, Kent pickets began mass picketing on the Monday with one hundred and fifty travelling to a Brighton power station and also to Corrals coal depot in Shoreham, where they persuaded the owners to allow only priority domestic supply. On the Wednesday this mass picket moved to Gravesend where the pickets dispersed across three sites: Southfleet Junction rail depot; Swanscombe cement works; and Northfleet docks. They had some success at Southfleet Junction with TGWU drivers agreeing to tip their loads, and the picket then continued at Swanscombe cement works until the company agreed to use only TGWU drivers.[30]

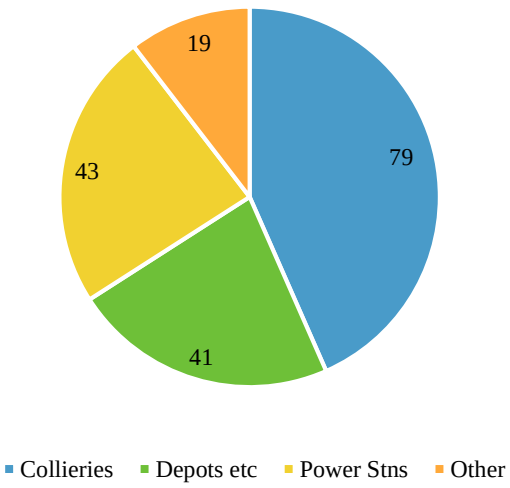
### 5.7 Week Three: 24 - 30 January 1972

In week three, the picketing of stocks remained largely peaceful with most constabularies reporting, for example; 'peaceful picketing', 'no disorder', 'orderly and well behaved'. The majority of picket numbers reported in the police telexes remained twenty or fewer (sixty-six percent) though this showed a significant drop from week two. Those with ten or fewer pickets rose to forty-seven percent, whilst those with over twenty more than doubled to thirty-four percent.[31] This indicates that the picketing diverged during week three into small observational and token picketing on the one hand, and larger scale *interventionist* picketing on the other, though the latter almost exclusively concerned the picketing of safety and clerical staff. This concurs with Pitt's observation that it become obvious to the miners that whilst token pickets were enough where a strong trade union organisation existed, they were useless against determined strike-breakers.[32] The larger scale picketing included that at Cliff Quay power station at Ipswich docks throughout the week, primarily to halt the supply of oil. This began with six hundred pickets (far and away the largest recorded picket numbers to date) before dropping to a coach-load for each of three shifts by Friday.[33] One hundred and fifty pickets also attempted to stop the removal of coal from Corrals' depot in Dover, where the police reported threatening behaviour and assault, though no arrests were made, and one picket

[30] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, pp.144-8
[31] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 31 January 1972; Twelve of twenty-five constabularies in Week 3 gave no attributable figures
[32] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, p.136
[33] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Suffolk, 31 January 1972

was injured after being struck by a lorry.[34] In Warwickshire, although picketing was reportedly normal with no incidents, it became hostile to everyone attempting to cross picket lines, which were up to fifty-strong at Coventry colliery and Keresley Home Fire plant.[35] In Durham the police telexes show a significant upswing in the numbers of miners picketing this week with both a larger daily average and more large-scale picketing, with twenty-five occasions when fifty or more pickets attended a site. The sites picketed varied daily as did the numbers of pickets at each site. At the Burnwright Coal Company depot in Eldon, for example, picket numbers built during the week from ten on Monday up to fifty on Thursday before dropping back to six on the Friday, presumably following some success in stopping the movement of coal.[36] The DTI noted during the week that pickets 'have effectively stopped all movement of coal into ports on the South and East coasts around to the Wash'.[37] At the end of the week the NCB reported that twenty-three depots had been closed: fifteen due to their location within the curtilage of the parent colliery, and eight due to both industrial and non-industrial staff being on strike.[38]

**Fig.5.3. Types of Establishment Picketed, England & Wales: Week Three.**[39]




[34] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[35] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Warwickshire & Coventry, 31 January 1972
[36] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 24 & 31 January 1972
[37] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January 1972
[38] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 28 January 1972
[39] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 31 January 1972

In a letter to Industry Minister Sir John Eden at the end of the third week, Ezra noted that the NUM did not appear able to influence many of their local representatives, and cited a leaflet issued by the strike liaison committee at Calverton colliery, Nottinghamshire, which he believed appeared to assert the committee's right to decide who shall enter the pit, and also that it did not restrict its actions to peaceful persuasion.[40] This position was reflected in an NCB marketing report, which noted that the pickets at stocking depots were 'without exception very determined to ensure that their terms (which in some cases are entirely different from terms agreed with the NUM at a higher level) are carried out to the letter.'[41] These comments bear out the general sense that during the first three weeks local Areas, branches, liaison committees, and indeed picket lines, rather than the national leadership, made the decisions about what was the best course of action. These decisions included such issues as how many pickets were needed, upon which sites pickets should focus their attention, where picket lines should be placed, who should be allowed into the collieries, and what terms were considered acceptable locally. Discipline was also largely determined locally, and an NUM branch secretary reported that he was 'like the coach of the football team who tells them to play hard but fair… keep out of trouble and if any one raises a fist to you, well you must defend yourselves, etc… I would be telling these men they've got to be disciplined and not to break the law.'[42]

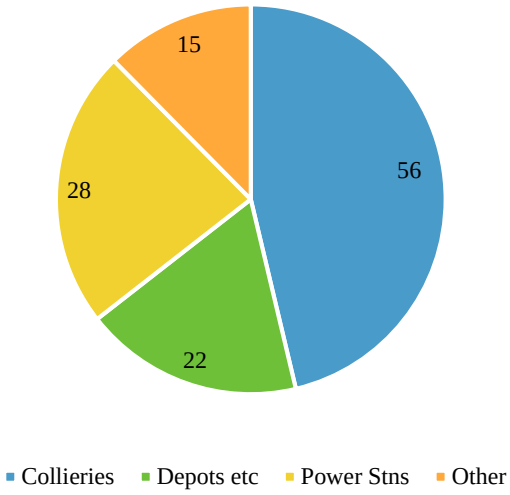
### 5.8 Week Four: 31 January - 6 February 1972

In week four, the picketing of stocks remained largely peaceful with constabularies reporting for example; 'no disorder', 'no serious incidents', 'well-behaved pickets', and almost three quarters of picket numbers reported were twenty or less.[43] The larger scale picketing included eighty to one hundred pickets at Eston Jetty and BSC Coke Ovens (adjacent sites at Teesside docks), and seventy pickets at Burnwright Coal Company's depot in Eldon, Durham.[44] Between twenty and fifty miners from South Wales and Somerset picketed Dunball docks at Bridgwater, Somerset over four days, but despite this presence

[40] TNA: COAL 31/300, Letter, Ezra to Eden, 27 January 1972
[41] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 28 January 1972. Emphasis in original
[42] Cited in Geary, R., *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985*, (Cambridge, 1985) p.122
[43] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 6 February 1972; Seven of nineteen constabularies in Week 4 gave no attributable figures
[44] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham and Teesside, 31 January 1972

two ships reportedly discharged eleven hundred tons of coal.[45] In Nottinghamshire three hundred and fifty pickets tried to prevent loaded lorries from leaving Radiant Fuels Company depot at Boughton leading to skirmishes and twelve arrests,[46] whilst in the south of the county the NCB reported light picketing with just eighty pickets in operation throughout the Area.[47] The Barnsley 'flying pickets' continued to operate in East Anglia with Norfolk Constabulary reporting seven coach-loads of pickets being deployed across the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire.[48]

**Fig.5.4. Types of Establishment Picketed, England & Wales: Week Four.**[49]




There was an increase in the picketing of power stations during week four, and this moved beyond the picketing of fuel. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that essential chemicals, and even food and milk for power station canteens, were being picketed,[50] whilst *The Economist* reported a shortage of 'lubricating oil for the bulldozers that shift coal about' at the power stations. The CEGB claimed that power stations were losing generating capacity of 3,000MV (5% of national capacity), not due to lack of coal but because pickets were stopping kindling oil,

[45] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Somerset & Bath, 7 February 1972
[46] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[47] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 2 February 1972
[48] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Norfolk, 7 February 1972
[49] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 7 February 1972
[50] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/17, 31 January 1972

caustic soda, hydrogen gas and steel piping from entering power stations.[51] The Board reported some success, with massive picketing having been avoided at Kilmarnock power station and oil deliveries achieved during Tuesday night. In the Northwestern Area, picketing was concentrated entirely on transport and the NCB noted that this had made work more difficult and that transport drivers might have to be laid off the following week.[52] At the end of the week the NCB reported that picketing at the pits in Scotland was very light and rather appeared to be concentrated on the power stations and on river traffic in the Forth.[53] Six pickets were arrested at power stations in Scotland, four for breaching the peace at Kincardine and one each at Longannet and Portobello in Edinburgh.[54]

On 3 February, at the end of the fourth week, a picket, Fred Matthews, was struck and killed by an articulated lorry leaving Keadby power station, Lincolnshire, after workers there had refused to unload its cargo of alum. He was one of fifty pickets from Bentley colliery, Yorkshire on a twenty-four-hour picket.[55] His death was raised by a number of MPs in the Commons, with Thomas Swain, MP for the mining constituency of Derbyshire North East, seemingly fearing a backlash by the pickets claiming that: 'This could be the start of another Ulster in the Yorkshire coalfield',[56] with an obvious reference to the 'Bloody Sunday' shootings in (London)Derry four days earlier. The DTI report noted, however, that: 'There were no subsequent hostile incidents by the pickets … as a result of the accident.'[57] Sandbrook describes the incident as 'a lorry accidentally ran over and killed a tipsy miner', which appears to both downplay the incident and the reportedly dangerous driving of the lorry driver, and to elevate Matthews' level of intoxication. The alcohol level in his blood was described at his inquest as being 'above the level for drivers but below the critical level for intoxication.' The pathologist also stated that she 'did not think there would have been any signs of impairment of his faculties.'[58]

[51] *The Times*, 31 January; *The Economist*, 5 February 1972; Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.221; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.50
[52] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 2 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[53] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 4 February 1972
[54] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[55] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/20, 3 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[56] HC Deb, 3 February 1972, vol.830 c.677
[57] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/20, 3 February 1972
[58] Sandbrook, D., *State of Emergency. The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974*, (London, 2010) p.121; *The Times*, 4 & 5 February 1972

### 5.9 Week Five: 7 - 13 February 1972

In week five, the picketing of coal stocks remained largely peaceful with constabularies reporting, for example; 'no disorder', 'peaceful' or 'no serious incidents'. The police telexes show a further divergence between smaller *token* and larger *interventionist* picketing with sixty percent of picket lines having ten or fewer pickets and thirty-three percent having over twenty.[59] The majority of the larger scale picketing was concerned with safety and clerical staff, though there were some significant large-scale interventions to halt the movement of fuel. Picketing in most constabularies concerned power stations and coal depots, though with an increase in the picketing of opencast coal sites. In the Durham force area, the larger-scale picket lines were focused on preventing fuel movement from a number of private depots; two hundred pickets at Wades reclamation depot in West Auckland, sixty and fifty pickets respectively at Kirby's and Bensons sea coal depots in Hartlepool, and fifty pickets at O'Toole's reclamation quarry in Bishop Auckland. In Teesside, Stockton gasworks was picketed by thirty pickets daily and the Shell Mex refinery at Teesdock had two hundred and fifty pickets over two days. The police reported that militant elements were apparent at the latter, but that there was no serious incident and an agreement was reached between the unions.[60] Around one hundred Lancashire pickets forcefully prevented the entry of vehicles to Fiddlers Ferry power station with seven pickets arrested for insulting behaviour and assaults on the police. Five pickets were also arrested at Charrington coal depot in North London for obstructing a footpath and refusing to move.[61] At the end of the fifth week, the NCB reported that picketing remained a highly effective weapon with oil tanker drivers now refusing to attempt to cross picket lines. They noted, however, that going forward picketing would begin to lose its relevance because the disruption caused by the inability to move essential supplies would be eclipsed by the absolute shortage of coal.[62]

Towards the end of the third week the Government had discussed the possibility of using helicopters to deliver essential supplies such as oxygen to the power

[59] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 14 February 1972; Eleven of nineteen constabularies in Week 5 gave no attributable figures
[60] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham and Teesside, 14 February 1972
[61] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[62] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Marketing Report, 11 February 1972

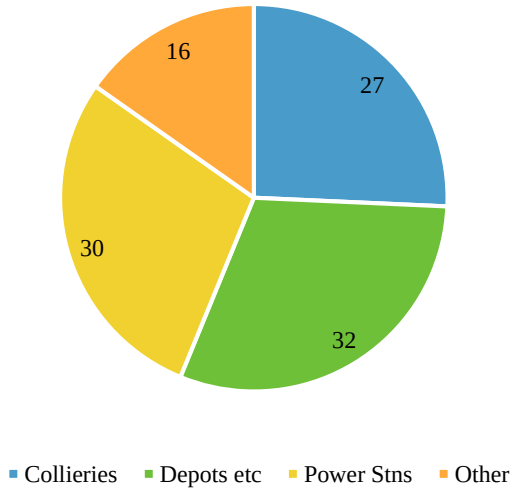
stations though, with one eye on public opinion, it considered it unwise to use them at that stage as their use might be seen as a sign of the miners' success and so worsen rather than improve the chance of a settlement.[63] A week or so later, during week five, the DTI recorded that the CEGB had requested the use of a Royal Air Force (RAF) helicopter to transport hydrogen supplies into Thorpe Marsh power station, but the DTI had not agreed in case it jeopardised negotiations with the NUM. The CEGB responded the same day to say that there appeared to be a misunderstanding as they had understood the issue to be in part the use of an RAF aerodrome, and insufficient advantage to justify the use of RAF hydrogen or RAF aerodromes. However, the CEGB informed the DTI that it had in fact begun to use the NCB's own helicopter, usually used for inspecting power line faults in bad weather or difficult locations, and hoped that the DTI would not mind this use of its normally available transportation. The DTI subsequently responded that it had no problem with this arrangement.[64] The following day, 9 February, the DTI noted a press report that hydrogen supplies had been delivered by helicopter to Thorpe Marsh on several occasions over the last few days and that power station workers were considering whether to use these supplies, but that their union had asked them to do so.'[65] The DTI post mortem of the strike later reported that a helicopter had supplied hydrogen to Thorpe Marsh power station on 18 February 'by crossing picket line',[66] which seems a rather odd way of phrasing it, but perhaps accounts for why the power station workers were unsure whether to use the supplies.

The two most significant picketing events in week five were those at Longannet power station in Fife, and at Nechells gasworks in Birmingham. The picket of Longannet, which began in week four, was reported to have very large numbers with pickets preventing oil from being delivered to the power station from the Firth of Forth and also attempting to talk to power station workers on their way to work,[67] presumably with a view to persuading them to refuse to handle picketed supplies. This picketing would come to a head in week six with the controversial arrest of pickets and the intervention of government ministers to ensure their

[63] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), Ministerial Committee (MC), Emergencies, 2nd Meeting, 26 January 1972
[64] TNA: POWE14/2661, Letter, Garner to Hawkins, 8 February; Replies, 8 & 10 February 1972
[65] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/22, 5-6 February; PRCS/23, 7 February; PRCS/25, 9 February 1972
[66] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[67] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 8 & 9 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/27, 11-14 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

release; it is discussed in more detail below. The picketing of Nechells gasworks, better known as Saltley or Saltley Gate, had taken place on and off over the course of the strike, but became the scene of a massive blockade and stand-off between pickets and the police this week, with the assistance of thousands of engineers from Birmingham, as well as students and members of the public; it is discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine.

**Fig.5.5. Types of Establishment Picketed, England & Wales: Week Five.**[68]




## 5.10 Week Six: 14 - 20 February 1972

At the end of the sixth week the Home Office cancelled the need for constabularies to report picketing incidents in the belief that it was receiving 'nothing of any importance' from the process. Consequently, the reports for that week, due on 21 February (the Monday of week seven), were not sent.[69] The analysis for week six, to the extent that it is based on the police telexes, is therefore able to draw only on the picketing on the Monday of that week. However, at the beginning of the sixth week the NUM took the decision to reduce picket numbers generally,[70] though liaison committees took their own decisions locally with regard to compliance. A Barnsley liaison committee member

[68] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 14 February 1972
[69] TNA: HO325/101, Note, McQueen to Hilary, 21 February 1972; Telex, Home Office to Constabularies (undated, assumed 21 February 1972)
[70] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS28, 15 February 1972

reportedly told the press: 'I don't care what the NUM says about the pickets, the strike committee here will decide when to reduce picket numbers.'[71] The DTI reported that picketing to interrupt rail-borne supplies to power stations and to prevent rail dispatches from Shellhaven and Coryton refineries in Essex was continuing, but that road movement had to some extent compensated for this.[72] In London, two pickets used a boat and a loud hailer to picket Fulham power station from the Thames,[73] and pickets also used a Thames pleasure steamer draped with banners and proclaimed it to be an official NUM picket boat; dockers and power workers from power stations on the Thames were therefore able to refuse to handle fuel by claiming that it had passed through an official NUM picket line.[74] In Nottinghamshire, between five hundred and seven hundred pickets, over two days, tried to prevent loaded lorries from leaving Radiant Fuels Company depot, Boughton and pickets also obstructed lorries at West Burton power station; police made twelve arrests on obstruction and assault charges, and offences against the Public Order Act. Pickets used obstruction and force, including some stone throwing, to try to prevent lorries from entering Dunball wharf at Bridgwater, Somerset to load coal being delivered there; one picket was arrested and an agreement was reached with the dockers for subsequent ships to be unloaded but for the coal to be retained at the wharf. At Keadby power station, where picketing continued following Fred Matthews' death, there were skirmishes between police and pickets; a few pickets were slightly hurt and one was arrested. At Thorpe Marsh power station two tankers carrying acid and caustic soda had tried to run the picket lines, and reportedly 'it was necessary for pickets to lie down in the road to stop the lorries.' Pickets were warned to check all tankers by turning on the tap, as one tanker claiming to be carrying distilled water entered Keadby and power workers later reported to the pickets that it was actually carrying oil.[75]

[71] *Doncaster Evening Post*, 17 February 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.228
[72] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/29, 16 February 1972
[73] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Metropolitan Police, 14 February 1972
[74] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, pp.161-2
[75] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972; Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.223

## 5.11 Longannet Power Station

Picketing at Longannet power station began on 3 February and lasted for around two weeks, with a twofold strategy: to prevent South of Scotland Electricity Board (SSEB) employees and their vehicles from reaching the power station; and to prevent its supply of coal being used for any other SSEB power station, in particular Cockenzie on the other side of the Firth of Forth, the second largest after Longannet. Members of ASLEF had promised the NUM that once the strike began that they would refuse to carry coal from Longannet or anywhere else. The numbers of pickets varied but reached a high point during week six. On Monday 14 February over two thousand pickets confronted some four hundred police officers who were attempting to keep the road open, though a number of cars were turned back by pickets. The action culminated in clashes between pickets and police with three police officers being hospitalised and one sustaining a broken ankle. The NCB also claimed evidence of sabotage since dirt was found in the power station lubricating system. Seven pickets were charged with breach of the peace, and thirteen were arrested on the unusual charge of 'mobbing and rioting' and held overnight. Many of the miners viewed the arrest of the thirteen as vindictive, and one hundred and fifty gathered outside the court to protest the arrest and the court's refusal to grant bail. Police cleared the protesters and the accused were taken to Saughton prison, Edinburgh.[76] The mass picketing continued during the week with over four hundred pickets each day and two thousand five hundred on the Thursday. There were a further eight arrests though on lesser charges of assaults on the police or breach of the peace. The leaders of the TUC and the Scottish TUC complained to the Scottish Office and a deputation of Scottish mining MPs appealed to the Lord Advocate, the Government's chief law officer in Scotland. His intervention subsequently accelerated the judicial process from the normal several weeks to a matter of days. The accused were subsequently released on bail on 17 February, three days after their arrest, and a celebratory crowd of one thousand miners gathered in Dunfermline High Street to welcome them back. The Government intervention, to effectively overturn an earlier court decision, foreshadowed the use by the Heath Government, later in the year, of the Official Solicitor to accelerate the release of the dockers known

[76] Phillips, J., 'The 1972 miners' strike: popular agency and industrial politics in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.20, No.2, 2006, pp.187-204

as the 'Pentonville Five', who were arrested under the I.R.Act legislation, leading to a massive trade unionist protest and the threat of strike action.[77]

### 5.12 Week Seven: 21 - 27 February 1972

Despite the official end of picketing on Saturday 19 February, and the subsequent lifting of restrictions on the movement of coal, the NCB reported that pickets were still active at depots in Scotland, Yorkshire, the Midlands and South Wales early in the week but that by Friday all pickets had been withdrawn, except at one depot in South Wales. Pickets in Yorkshire and the Midlands had disrupted the movement of bulk supplies from Wath and Warsop collieries and were still insisting on rigid adherence to priority lists, and for supplies from depots to be moved only by trade unionists.[78] The DTI reported that acceptance of the NEC's negotiated settlement following the Wilberforce Inquiry report was recommended unanimously, or by large majorities, in Yorkshire, Scotland, Wales, the Midlands, Durham, Northumberland and Kent. In Derbyshire the area council recommended acceptance but that the overtime ban should continue until the NCB had paid the wage arrears to miners dismissed under the previous overtime ban. The picketing of oil installations ended and there were no reports of picketing at oil delivery points. The DTI reported that if picketing continued in Scotland during the week, because of the Longannet arrests, gas supply problems could arise, and there was also a report of a threat that there should be a one-day strike when the thirteen miners were to be tried unless the charge was greatly reduced. Coal deliveries from existing stranded stocks began to resume nationally though initially somewhat sporadically and not at first to non-essential industry. By the middle of the week, supplies were reportedly getting through in all regions and by the end of the week the NCB reported that it had sent out around one million tons of coal.[79]

[77] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972; National Archives of Scotland: HH 56/96, Flaherty to Hole, 16 & 18 February, & Chief Constable, Fife, to Secretary of State for Scotland, 17 February 1972, cited in Phillips, 'The 1972 miners' strike', pp.187-204

[78] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 25 February 1972

[79] TNA: PREM15/986, PRCS/32, 19-21 February; PRCS/33, 22 February; PRCS/34, 23 February; PRCS/37, 26-28 February 1972

## 5.13 Conclusion

Picketing during the 1972 strike was not primarily mass or militant picketing; the majority of the general picketing that took place was small scale and largely incident free. The former portrayal is based on two separate aspects of the strike: the increasingly militant and large-scale picketing of safety and clerical staff on the one hand (discussed in Chapter Six) and the mass picketing events at Longannet power station and at the Saltley depot (discussed in Chapter Nine) on the other. The picketing of the collieries, coal depots, power stations, opencast sites and docks mostly involved negotiations or discussions between pickets and drivers, power station workers, and dockers. This was not always successful but mostly did not result in aggression. The picketing over the weeks developed from small and medium sized picket lines into a divergence between smaller *token* pickets and larger scale more *interventionist* picketing. The innovative use of larger scale and even mass picketing developed in part where small-scale picketing was found to be ineffectual. In particular, appealing to non-unionised drivers, whose wages depended on a delivery or collection, was often found to fall on deaf ears: similarly, with appeals to dock workers paid on piece-work. Consequently, the miners found the need to increase the size of the picket lines in order, in effect, to blockade the site entrance where their appeals were not being accepted. Darlington and Lyddon make the point that mass picketing developed due to the miners' observation of these facts: the ineffectiveness of small pickets and conversely the clear effectiveness of mass picketing.[80] Power stations were the key, and Phillips argues that the miners' victory was achieved through mass picketing and the blockading of power stations, such as Longannet, and that this show of force also encouraged the view that trade unions were undemocratic organisations who wielded power irresponsibly, and that this was a threat to public order.[81] The Government were, despite much preparation, clearly unprepared for the way in which the strike played out. Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, noted that the 'possibility of mass picketing, which would prevent oil and coal getting to power stations, was simply not on the agenda'.[82]

[80] Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.45
[81] Phillips, 'The 1972 miners' strike', pp.189-90
[82] Thatcher, M., *The Path to Power*, (London, 1995) p.216

# Chapter 6

# Picketing of Staff

## 6.1 Introduction

Several unions, in addition to the NUM, operated in the coalfields: two clerical unions – COSA (an NUM affiliated section) and CAWU; the senior managers' union BACM (British Association of Colliery Management); and NACODS, effectively junior management, who undertook specialist, safety and maintenance work and had an overseeing role in the pits. This chapter considers the picketing of members of these unions who continued to work during the strike. The NEC agreed with the NCB that it was essential to undertake maintenance work during the dispute and also that the miners should continue to provide safety cover at the pits, and gave national directives stating that this work was required to be undertaken by members of the NUM during the strike. In this sense 'safety' is taken to mean such action as is necessary to keep the mines safe from the build-up of water and methane gas, to keep fans, pumps and winding equipment in good working order, and other similar work. The chapter considers the picketing that took place in defiance of the NEC's directives, and assesses the nature and extent of such picketing, the tactics and strategies employed and developed, and the ways in which these varied across and within the mining Areas. It considers the development of this picketing over the seven weeks of the strike as it became increasingly large scale and militant, though with significant variation, and included some of the most hostile action during the dispute. The chapter demonstrates that there was widespread disregard amongst the miners on the picket lines for the directives issued by the union leadership, both at national and Area level. It discusses the reasons for the miners' decisions to refrain from undertaking safety work, and for stopping others from doing so. This appears, on

the one hand, to have been a negotiating tactic in applying pressure on the NCB to resolve the dispute, but on the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, to have exposed a deep anger and frustration felt by miners towards the Government, the Board, and the NUM leadership but primarily towards those breaking the strike. The chapter shows that the decision to picket officials and clerical workers reflects differing and divergent views on the future of the industry held by the leadership and the membership.

## 6.2 NUM Statement

After rejecting the NCB's final wage offer on 21 December 1971 the NUM, in preparation for the strike, issued instructions to the Areas stating that those expected to work during the strike included pumpsmen, winding-engine men, fan attendants and similar, including NUM members concerned with the safe operating of pumping, winding and ventilation machinery. Also, in the event of an emergency affecting the safety of the men or the pit, additional men would be allowed to deal with the situation; the liaison committees should allow only the minimum number of men on any shift to ensure the necessary degree of safety.[1] The NUM's official position was that it considered it essential to maintain the physical integrity of the mines, for example from the risk of roof collapse, flooding, or fire (due to the build-up of methane gas). The NCB highlighted additional factors of concern, namely that roof collapses or movements underground might lead to capital equipment being trapped, damaged, or lost entirely and that the deterioration or loss of coal faces would lead to an increased delay in the recovery of output after the strike.[2] The implication, therefore, of maintenance work not being undertaken was that if it was a long strike the mines could become unsafe or unusable in the future and that the survival of a colliery or indeed of the industry was potentially in the balance. In response to arguments that lack of safety cover could lead to pit closures the miners noted the large number of pit closures there had been since nationalisation whilst miners had refrained from industrial action, maintained the pits, and been compliant with the NCB's productivity drives. Douglass argues that refusing maintenance work

[1] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[2] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/2, 13 January; PRCS/4, 15-16 January; FV38/184 DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

implied ‘a fight to the finish’ and that it was ‘something quite unprecedented’.[3] Whilst the implication is correct, maintenance workers had in fact been withdrawn or picketed during other disputes in the early twentieth century including in South Wales (1910), in Yorkshire (1919) and during the national lockout of miners (1926), though none of these was on the scale of 1972.

The action taken against safety workers had little effect on the outcome of the dispute, which was largely determined by the restriction of coal movement, particularly to the power stations, though Darlington and Lyddon argue that ‘the miners were not to know this at the time.’[4] Their implication is that the primary intention of the withdrawal of safety cover and the picketing of NACODS was to apply pressure in the wage negotiations by allowing mines to deteriorate and machinery to be threatened with destruction. However, there were other factors, not least the sense that those who crossed the picket lines, even to maintain the pits, were nevertheless strike-breaking, and they received some of the most militant and hostile action of the entire dispute. The NUM stated at the time of the overtime ban preceding the strike that safety cover should be maintained and that the ban was ‘subject to safety and the provision of certain services to our members’. The DTI subsequently commented that it was ‘not now clear whether this meant the safety of members or the safety of the mines.’[5] This implied the belief that the NUM were not concerned with maintaining the pits but only for their own safety, which rather misrepresents the intentions of the NUM leadership, though it is perhaps truer for the miners themselves. Yorkshire miner Tommy Mullany made a similar point in remarking that the term ‘safety’ was being misused as the Board wanted to save property not men, since men were safest out of the pits.[6] Nottinghamshire miners interviewed by the *New Statesman* during the strike also drew attention to the dangers underground and to the men being safer out of the mines:

> You are scared every morning when you go down, every single morning… The longer you stay away, the harder it is to do. I was down for 36 years and never enjoyed a minute of it. It’s bad enough after the holiday. But now… it’ll take a lot to get them back, I’d say.

[3] Douglass, D.J., *Strike, Not the End of the Story: Reflections on the Major Coal Mining Strikes in Britain*, (Overton, 2005) p.20
[4] Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) pp.213-4
[5] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[6] Cited in Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) pp.184-5

> We'll stay out six weeks, six *months* if necessary… Six months out here is six months on my life, isn't it? It's six months breathing fresh air instead of dust.[7]

### 6.3 Hardening of Attitudes

The NACODS leadership refused to support the miners' dispute and the vast majority of its members stayed in work throughout the strike, which contrasted with the support the miners received from some other unions unconnected to the coal industry, in particular the transport unions (see Chapter Eight). This hardened the miners' attitude towards safety cover and towards the officials themselves, which had already hardened somewhat during the overtime ban. A member of the Swansea Steam strike committee noted the contrast between the attitude demonstrated by NACODS and that shown by other trade unionists:

> They (NACODS) called the police to take them through the picket line which, you know, caused tremendous bad feeling because here we were now in a position getting full co-operation of the railway workers, the Transport and General, the power workers and everyone else and here now men we were working with every day within our own pit, within our own industry, called the police.[8]

NACODS refusal to strike frustrated the miners for two reasons. Firstly, many members of NACODS had previously been miners, worked with the miners on a daily basis, and lived in the same communities. Secondly, and a key point of contention, NACODS own wages were directly linked to the outcome of the NUM's negotiations, in that NACODS wages were based on a percentage over and above the highest miners' grade. Therefore, if the strike led to the miners achieving a higher settlement then NACODS themselves would directly benefit from such a settlement. NACODS pay negotiations ran alongside those of the NUM and on 14 January, at the end of the first week of the strike, NACODS representatives met with the Board, which expressed its appreciation for the way they had responded to the dispute in putting the preservation of the pits uppermost. The NACODS representatives stated that the attainment of a bonus

[7] Adam, C., 'The Other Price of Coal', *New Statesman*, Vol.83, No.2133, 4 February 1972, pp.132-3

[8] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.13. Swansea Steam

of one fifth of their weekly wage (rather than the previous one sixth) was their priority, and that discussions on the general wage claim should wait until the strike had ended. They requested that the settlement be back-dated to 1 November 1971 and that the ten percent differential over the highest paid NPLA rate should be the accepted aim. The Board accepted the bonus claim and also the back-dating of the settlement, but could not guarantee the requested differential.[9] It was thus in NACODS' interest to demonstrate its loyalty to the Board and therefore to continue to work to preserve the mines and the colliery equipment, even at the expense of invoking the ire of the pickets, in order to guarantee the differential. When NACODS representatives met with the Board again following the Wilberforce Inquiry, several members of their committee stressed to the Board that the full claim should be granted, on this one occasion, and that members would be extremely dissatisfied if it were not.[10] This dissatisfaction stemmed from the serious fractures that had developed between the miners and NACODS due to the officials having done the Board's bidding.

### 6.4 Safety Cover

Instructions on the necessity of maintaining safety work were issued by the NUM nationally but the decisions on implementation were taken by liaison committees at branch and pit level and depended on the situation pertaining in each locality and the relative militancy or moderation of those concerned. It became immediately clear that the issue of safety cover was highly contentious. Allen notes that even amongst nominally left-wing leaders there was no consistent view on safety cover: some seeing it as essential to safeguard the pits because they belong to the miners; some stressing the importance of unifying behind the NEC; some believing that the branches should make the decisions; some saying that the mines were not worth saving if they could not provide decent wages; and others that the mines should be protected because to do so gave a favourable public image. Ultimately the miners' attitude coalesced around one point: if the NCB seriously wanted to protect pits then the solution was simple, accept the pay claim.[11] The Government's view was that the refusal to allow safety work

[9] KL: KA25/U/Z5, NACODS Conference Report, 1972; Minutes, NACODS and NCB, 14 January 1972
[10] KL: KA25/U/Z5, Report, NACODS NEC, 22 February 1972
[11] Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p.184

contravened the NEC's pre-strike undertaking and was a plain sign that local officials rather than national leaders were directing events.[12] *The Times* and *The Economist* noted that the refusal of the branches to undertake safety work revealed a depth of bitterness few thought existed.[13] The Government and press viewpoints demonstrate that the divergence between the rank-and-file and the leadership was, at this point, clear for all to see.

Estimates on the level of safety cover undertaken at any point vary, but universally show that cover began at a low level and then declined. The NCB gave figures for 'full safety coverage' in the first few days at fifty per cent of pits, dropping by the end of the week to just one quarter fully protected, one quarter partially protected, and one half with only NACODS cover. The DTI at the same time reported that two thirds of safety work was not being undertaken. At the beginning of the third week the NCB cited just thirty-four pits out of two hundred and eighty-nine (twelve percent) with full cover.[14] *The Times* and *Financial Times* reported that less than half the pits were covered on day one and just forty-six (sixteen percent) had full cover on day two. This figure fell to just thirty-eight (thirteen percent) at the beginning of the second week and to just thirty (ten percent) by the end of the strike. The same press reported that the number of pits with 'absolutely no cover' was just one hundred and thirty-three (forty-six percent), rising to one hundred and fifty-two (fifty-three percent) by the end of the third week.[15] In Yorkshire the proportion was lower than the national average with only three out of the region's seventy two pits (four percent) having any safety cover,[16] despite Area secretary Sam Bullough's plea that: 'These pits have to be kept safe until the men get back to work. This is one thing we have always done.'[17] Bullough was mistaken, safety work had not always been undertaken, as discussed previously, but his comments betray the leadership's frustration at the divergence of opinion with the rank-and-file on this issue.

[12] TNA: LAB 77/84, Holland, 'Note for the Record', 9 February 1972; Phillips, J., 'The 1972 miners' strike: popular agency and industrial politics in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.20, No.2, 2006, pp.198-9
[13] *The Economist* 15 January; *The Times* 14 January 1972
[14] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January & PRCS/11, 24 January 1972
[15] *The Times*, 10, 24 & 28 January & 21 February; *Financial Times*, 11 & 17 January & 1 February; TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/4, 15-16 January 1972
[16] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.226
[17] *Morning Telegraph*, 7 January 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.218

## 6.5 Picketing of Staff - an Overview

The progress of the strike varied across the Areas and a review of the picketing over the seven weeks shows marked differences in tactics, which were dependent on the relative levels of militancy or moderation, on greater or lesser levels of frustration and discontent and on what appeared to achieve the desired outcome.

**Distribution of Picket Numbers Against Officials and Clerical Staff, England & Wales.**[18]

**Fig.6.1. Week One: 9 - 15 January 1972**

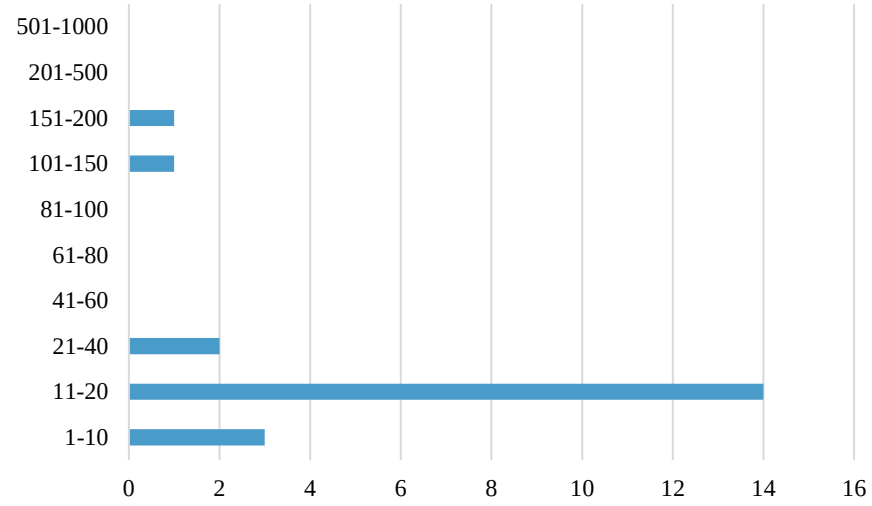
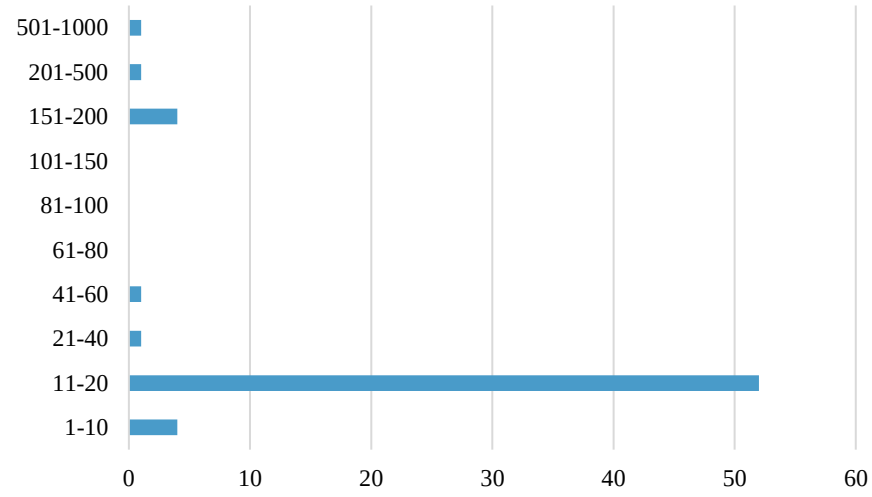



**Fig.6.2. Week Two: 16 - 22 January 1972**




[18] Source: TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 14 February 1972; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Reports; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports

**Fig.6.3. Week Three: 23 - 29 January 1972**

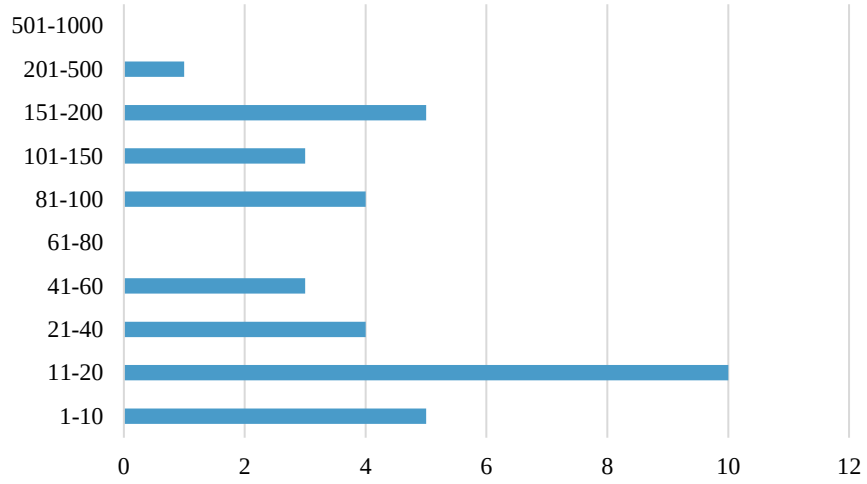



**Fig.6.4. Week Four: 30 January - 5 February 1972**

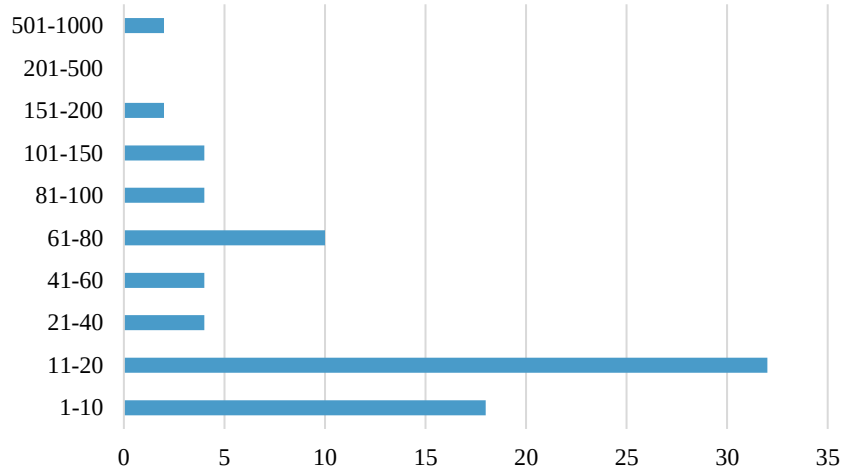
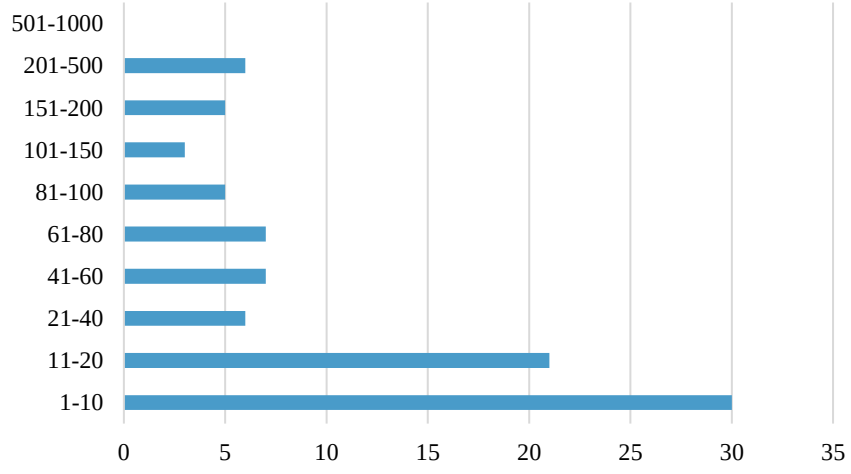



**Fig.6.5. Week Five: 6 - 12 February 1972**



In week one, attention was focused on the withdrawal of safety cover, which was against the express directives of the NEC. Picketing was overwhelmingly small-scale and peaceful with isolated incidents of hostility towards officials and safety workers. Picketing against clerks began, despite COSA members having been asked to stay in work to prepare the miners' final wage packets. In week two, safety cover was reduced and the picketing of NACODS extended; this took a notably militant and large-scale turn in some Areas, and a tactic of limiting rather than stopping NACODS developed in others. COSA came out on strike but the clerks who remained in work faced some particularly aggressive picketing. In week three, the picketing of NACODS intensified and showed variation with compromises evident in some Areas but an increase in militancy in others; the NCB complained of this development, particularly in the more productive central coalfield. The picketing of clerical workers became more militant in some Areas. In week four, some pickets allowed maintenance men in to the pits to deal with safety issues that had arisen, whilst pickets in other Areas moved to further limit safety cover. There was an extension of mass and aggressive picketing, and there continued to be a divergence between Areas restricting officials and those attempting to stop them. The picketing of clerical workers eased, though with notable exceptions. In week five, safety cover was further withdrawn, whilst picketing eased though remained militant and heavy in some places. Restrictions on the numbers of NACODS members allowed through picket lines continued with the Board complaining of officials who seemed to have made little effort to gain entry. The picketing of clerical workers was at a minimum but included some COSA members picketing colleagues who remained in work. Fred Matthews funeral took place and some pickets appealed to NACODS to respect the occasion, though this met with mixed results. In week six, there was a decline in picketing though it remained heavy in some locations. NACODS were allowed in to some of the pits and the NCB was subsequently able to report a general deterioration underground but a reluctance on behalf of officials to do any more than inspect the pits. Some Areas continued to restrict NACODS and there were moves to extend these restrictions. In week seven, as the strike drew to a close, pickets were withdrawn and safety cover resumed at most collieries, though NACODS continued to be restricted in some Areas. Some clerks returned to work.

### 6.6 Picketing of Officials - Week One

During week one, there was a widespread refusal to undertake safety work, despite national directives to do so, and several picket lines were established to prevent maintenance and safety work being undertaken. Decisions on the nature and extent of picketing were made by the liaison/strike committees at branch and district level, and NUM delegates from some Yorkshire branches attempted to force their leadership to withdraw all safety workers and demanded that the pickets stop NACODS, BACM and NUM winders from entering the pits.[19] In Cumberland and Derbyshire, mass meetings of miners voted to withdraw all underground safety cover from the outset.[20] Gormley appeared on the BBC's *Panorama* programme on the second evening of the strike, and appealed for miners to provide safety cover and complained that 'the men are being a damn sight more militant than we would like them to be'. On the third day the NCB met with the NUM leadership to discuss pit safety and to request that they allow small amounts of coal to be cut, two or three times each week, to stop the powered roof supports from becoming immovable and irreparably damaged by the immense pressure underground. The following day, Gormley again appealed to the miners for the pits to be kept in good working order, and noted that 'some men have been over-ambitious in applying the strike'. On the same day, Ezra reported to a Cabinet committee that, whilst the NUM agreed to cooperate with regard to fire, gas and water hazards, they were not prepared to arrange for the occasional cutting of coal in order to move equipment. The maintenance of the pits, he noted, therefore depended on the co-operation of NACODS.[21]

The NCB reported intimidation by pickets of men at workshops and garages at Bestwood colliery, Nottinghamshire, who then apparently refused to work despite police protection. At Shirebrook colliery, North Derbyshire, a winding-engine man was assaulted by pickets and his car was damaged, whilst at Kennox colliery in Scotland a fan-attendant was assaulted leaving work, and at Coventry colliery an under-manager needed a police escort to get through the picket line.[22] These actions demonstrate the pickets' immediate frustration at those who were

[19] *Morning Telegraph*, 8 January 1972 cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.218
[20] *Labour Research*, April 1972, p.67; Allen, *The Militancy of British Miners*, p.184
[21] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January; *The Times*, 11 & 12 January; *Financial Times*, 13 January; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.38-9
[22] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972

continuing to work and were crossing picket lines, and frustration was also felt in some quarters at NUM members who continued to undertake the safety cover requested by the leadership. Derbyshire miners crossed in to Leicestershire and attempted to stop the provision of cover at Measham, Donisthorpe and Ellistown collieries, but they were met with a hostile response.[23] An underground fire broke out at Goldthorpe-Highgate colliery, Doncaster and miners at the branch refused calls for help to extinguish it. The fire turned out not to be as serious as first thought, but the pickets were unaware at the time, and the Area agent commented that miners had 'been blackmailed long enough'.[24] In addition to the miners' growing refusal to provide safety cover, the pickets also began to stop NACODS members from undertaking safety and maintenance work with pickets restricting the number of officials to just eighteen at Calverton colliery, Nottinghamshire.[25]

### 6.7 Picketing of Officials - Week Two

During week two, some branches further reduced their safety cover and others increased the picketing of NACODS members to do the same, though pickets at Littlemill colliery in South Scotland assisted in clearing a mine fall, and the local NUM Area president considered assisting with roadway repairs at Dalkeith colliery.[26] Scotland was largely under CP leadership, and so this action accords with Ezra's comment that CP-led Areas were the most rigid in their adherence to Union directives in undertaking safety work.[27] Picketing remained overwhelmingly small scale during the week, but there was a tripling of the number of picket lines reported and an increase in large-scale *interventionist* picketing since the smaller scale picket lines were proving to be ineffectual. Pickets at Easington colliery, Durham began the week by peacefully leafleting

[23] Griffin, C., *The Leicestershire Miners, Vol. 3: 1945-1988,* (Coalville, 1989) pp.156-7 cited in Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.39-40. The collieries in Leicestershire and South Derbyshire were organised within the Leicestershire and the South Derbyshire Areas of the NUM. The Leicestershire Area's collieries were all within the geographical county of Leicestershire, whereas the South Derbyshire Area included collieries in both counties, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The NCB's administrative unit for all these collieries, and others elsewhere, was the South Midlands Area. Measham and Donisthorpe are pits in Leicestershire but fall within the South Derbyshire NUM Area. Derbyshire miners did not therefore cross the NUM Area boundary in approaching these two pits, but did so only with Ellistown, which is both in Leicestershire and in the Leicestershire NUM Area

[24] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners,* p.218

[25] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972

[26] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 21 January; COAL31/300, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972

[27] LSE: Hetherington/19/25, Ezra, 27 January 1972

NACODS members and imploring them to observe the strike, but this tactic clearly proved unsuccessful as sixty miners picketed the following day, and a mass picket of three hundred miners confronted the officials on the Friday.[28] In South Yorkshire there was a mass picket of three hundred miners at Manvers Main colliery, and at Cadeby colliery NACODS faced two hundred pickets on Tuesday, one hundred on Wednesday and large numbers of pickets for at least another week such that no NACODS got through the picket line. In addition, NACODS were turned back at two other collieries in the Area, and at one in North Yorkshire, two in Durham, and two in Nottinghamshire, which had two hundred pickets on occasion during the week. [29]

In addition to a general increase in the picketing of NACODS, there was also an upturn in militancy. At a meeting of the Northumberland NUM Executive it was unanimously decided that more physical pressure should be brought to bear on members of NACODS to join the strike. A more militant element at the meeting reportedly suggested extending this to physically preventing vehicles from entering colliery yards, and further suggestions were made that such vehicles would be overturned if they attempted to enter. Similar militant sentiments were expressed at six collieries in Wales, where pickets threatened to overturn vehicles,[30] and in North Derbyshire, where pickets broke the locks on the main gate at Langwith colliery and built a barricade behind them. In Nottinghamshire militancy was directed toward restricting the number of officials entering the pits rather than stopping them outright. Police assistance was required all week to enable NACODS members to enter Gedling colliery in the Area with picket numbers growing to two hundred on the Thursday and Friday, when pickets prevented officials from entering whilst it was still dark though thirty-three entered after daybreak aided by one hundred and twenty police officers. Officials were reportedly spat at and had their cars scratched, whilst threats were reportedly made to their wives and children and chanting took place outside their homes. The police reported that the picketing at Gedling was part of a campaign to dictate numbers allowed to work and they expected this strategy to spread to other local

[28] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 17, 20 & 24 January; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 21 January 1972

[29] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 17, 20 & 24 January, Nottinghamshire, 24 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 21 January 1972

[30] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Northumberland, 18 January, Dyfed, 24 January 1972

pits since two were already restricted, another was seeking such restrictions, and at a further colliery pickets allowed only five BACM managers to enter.[31]

### 6.8 Picketing of Officials - Week Three

During week three, there continued to be a divergence of attitudes on the provision of safety cover between the national, and sometimes Area, leadership and those at branch or strike committee level. In South Wales the CP-led Area Executive recommended that their members should continue to undertake safety work, but in South Yorkshire safety-men and winders at Cortonwood colliery joined the strike, and pickets at Cadeby colliery refused an NEC appeal to help save four pit faces which led to sixty hydraulic jacks, worth £400,000, being crushed. Branch secretary Tommy Ryan commented: 'We are prepared to let the mining industry decline if the Government does not think it is important enough to solve the problem for us.'[32] NUM officials at Ollerton colliery, Nottingham made similar comments: 'It's a con: if we keep pits in good order they can keep us out for as long as they want... If they're so worried about their bloody machines, let them make us a decent offer.'[33] Ezra complained of the physical damage to the pits in an interview with the *Guardian* editor and claimed that essential maintenance was being undertaken at just thirty pits. He noted that the overtime ban prior to the strike had meant that maintenance work was already behind but did not feel that any pit had yet been so badly damaged that it would not reopen, though there were faces within pits which would not be worked again. The NCB separately reported that eighty pit faces were threatened by lack of maintenance.[34]

The picketing of NACODS and BACM members intensified with officials being prevented from entering many pits in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire,[35] and NCB and NUM leaders noting that this was an 'unauthorised extension of official strike

[31] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 21 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972
[32] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January; PRCS/13, 26 January; *The Times*, 25 January; *Morning Telegraph* 24 & 25 January 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.227
[33] Adam, 'The Other Price of Coal', pp.132-3
[34] LSE: Hetherington/19/25, Ezra, 27 January; TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January 1972
[35] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972

action'.[36] The NCB's industrial relations member, G.C. Shephard, wrote to Gormley on 24 January to complain about the NUM's picketing of officials and the threat this posed to the safety of the collieries. He highlighted particularly collieries in the central coalfield, which were of most concern to the NCB being the most productive and integral to the future of the industry. Shephard noted that one hundred and forty-eight collieries were without any NUM safety cover, fifty-three others had only winders, fifty-four had partial safety cover, and only thirty-four had full safety cover.[37]

Gormley replied on 27 January and, whilst noting that the NEC were making constant appeals to their members for the picketing to be peaceful and for adequate safety cover to be undertaken, he believed it was incumbent upon him to bring certain incidents to Shephard's attention, which could account for the pickets' attitude. Gormley noted that at Sacriston and East Heddon collieries, Durham, NACODS members, 'with the connivance of management', were reportedly 'seen to be bringing up the colliery bags of coal, which they have filled underground with the intention of taking this coal for their own use', and in the process received assistance from NUM apprentices. In addition, at Hawthorn colliery, Durham, a private lorry had reportedly gone through the picket line, 'with the connivance of BACM', ostensibly to collect coal for hospital use but the coal was actually designated for BACM and NACODS members still at work. Gormley warned that incidents such as these would worsen the situation 'and make the picket lines harder and harder, until we are the stage where anger will prevail.' He alluded to the picket lines being infiltrated by persons unknown for the purpose of causing disturbances and discrediting the union to ensure media coverage, and noted that 'cameras always seem to be on the spot at the same time as these disturbances take place.' He accused the NCB of issuing 'couped up' [sic] photographs to the press showing damaged pit roadways allegedly caused by the pickets' refusal to allow safety work, when these photos actually predated the strike and were due to 'months and months of bad, bad management'. He claimed that the issuing of such photographs can only have been in order to discredit the NUM.[38]

[36] *The Times*, 28 January 1972
[37] TNA: COAL78/1906, Letters, Shephard to Gormley, 21 & 24 January 1972
[38] TNA: COAL31/383, Letter, Gormley to Shephard, 27 January 1972

Miners at Ollerton colliery, Nottingham made a similar accusation noting that 'many of the horror pictures of the so-called deterioration' show sites that were just as bad before the strike and about which there had been previous complaints.[39] These episodes highlight the growing frustration on all sides, with accusations and counter-accusations by both the NCB and the NUM leadership. In the case of the latter, though they were concerned at the growing militancy in the ranks, they clearly felt obliged to relay to the Board accusations of misbehaviour received from the liaison committees, to counter the accusations of violence reported by the Board. The episodes also point to the Board's attempts to manipulate public opinion which is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

The internal NCB report, upon which Shephard's 21 January letter to Gormley was based, gave a summary of the situation at the pits in question and reflected discussions and resultant compromises having taken place between the pickets and officials at some collieries; in particular a restriction on the numbers of safety workers being allowed to work rather than an outright ban on officials entering the mines. At eight pits in Nottinghamshire the Board reported that there were initial attempts by officials to go into work, but that the pickets then issued an ultimatum that put a limit on the numbers allowed to enter, and subsequently this was generally accepted by NACODS. A similar process of negotiating a limit on safety workers occurred at four pits in South Midlands. Bans on management from entering the collieries, as opposed to under-officials, were largely lifted during the week, but the nature and effectiveness of the picketing varied; some of this was described as 'heavy but not violent', whilst at other pits abuse was hurled at those crossing picket lines with officials' cars also reportedly being scratched. The NCB reported a different tactical approach in South Yorkshire with pickets at six pits stopping NACODS officials on one day and then NACODS getting through the picket lines the next day; there is no mention of agreed numbers being allowed through the picket lines, but rather a daily attempt by NACODS for all officials to gain entry and of pickets trying to prevent all of them from doing so, with varied success. The report noted that on occasion officials were turned back for the day shift, when most pickets were in attendance, but then they were able to gain entry for the evening or night shift, when few or no pickets were present. In North Yorkshire the report refers to heavy picketing

[39] Adam, 'The Other Price of Coal', pp.132-3

at one pit that prevented officials from entering, but the NCB gave an admonishment 'that there was very little determination to pass the picket lines.'[40]

In North Derbyshire there was mass picketing of NACODS at four pits, which intensified as the week progressed involving an average of two hundred at Markham colliery, where pickets obstructed the highway, and around one hundred and fifty at the other three pits. The police reported few incidents of actual violence here, but rather that the pickets maintained an attitude of 'truculence and determination'. There were also reports of significant picketing at sixteen collieries in Durham with picket numbers of up to two hundred at eleven collieries.[41] Aggressive picketing was reported in South Yorkshire during week three, where one hundred and fifty pickets prevented NACODS officials from entering Dinnington colliery, and in South Midlands where up to fifty pickets were hostile to everyone attempting to enter Coventry colliery and BACM managers were prevented from entering Donisthorpe colliery. Officials at Lynemouth colliery, Northumberland were attacked with one man being dragged along the road and another hit by a bottle.[42] At Langwith colliery, Derbyshire, black paint and grease were daubed on the houses of eighteen officials and winding-engine men who had crossed the picket line, and two hundred pickets prevented all but eleven officials getting in to work the following day.[43] The differing approaches of the pickets between and within Areas, both in terms of numbers of pickets in attendance and in the relative levels of militancy, shows that tactics were being decided 'on the ground' and in the localities, rather than by the national leadership. Seemingly liaison/strike committees were basing their approach on what appeared to work in their locality, with pickets largely ignoring the directives of the NUM leadership to continue to provide safety cover and to allow officials to enter the pits.

[40] TNA: COAL 31/383, Report, 'NUM picketing of NACODS members', 24 January 1972
[41] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 24 & 31 January 1972
[42] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Warwickshire, 31 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972
[43] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Derbyshire, 31 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; PREM15/984, PRCS18, 1 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

### 6.9 Picketing of Officials - Week Four

During week four the response to the issue of safety cover continued to vary, with pickets responding to calls for assistance in dealing with emergency maintenance issues at some pits, but further reducing cover at others. The Government noted that the NUM had threatened to withdraw cover at the NCB's coke ovens, which would subsequently crack and become unserviceable if they were allowed to cool.[44] In Durham, winders at Seaham colliery went in to help with a rope-capping issue, whilst at Blackhall colliery the cover situation decreased from part-cover to winding-engine men only. In West Wales, cover was withdrawn from the fans and pumps at Coed Cae colliery leaving it without any cover at all, and at Deep Duffryn, Abercynon and Penrhiwceiber (Penrikyber) collieries in East Wales pickets reportedly increased pressure on winding-engine men to withdraw, which the NCB expected would result in a wider reaction from winders and an ultimate withdrawal of their services. The East Wales Area Executive came under pressure to withdraw all safety men and to bring pressure to bear on NACODS to restrict attendances by its officials. The increasing withdrawal of safety cover by the pickets led NACODS officials to begin to cover pits other than their own; underground heating issues at Newdigate and Rawdon collieries, South Midlands, were assisted by officials from five nearby collieries with the agreement of the NUM's safety inspector.[45]

Week four saw an upturn in mass picketing against NACODS officials. Heavy picketing was reported at Clipstone colliery, Nottinghamshire, with pickets facing two hundred police, though an alternative version cites two hundred and fifty pickets clashing with three hundred police. The DTI noted that there was no violence during the incident though miners interviewed by the *New Statesmen* claimed that the pickets were arrested 'in a fight with deputies', and explained that there was no need for one hundred men to go down a pit for routine gas-leak or water checks, as twenty would have been sufficient and the rest of them would surely do additional maintenance work if they were allowed in.[46] NACODS were prevented from entering Clipstone colliery the following day because the police

[44] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 3rd Meeting, 28 January 1972
[45] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/18, 1 February; PRCS/19, 2 February; PRCS/20, 3 February; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2-4 February 1972
[46] TNA: HO325/101, Letter, Allen to Departmental list, 1 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972; Adam, 'The Other Price of Coal', pp.132-3; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.39-40

were not in attendance. This was reportedly because police did not want to split their forces and were instead concentrating on heavy picketing at Bevercotes colliery. This mirrored the miners' own practice of concentrating pickets and placing them where they would be most effective. Later in the week NACODS officials at both Clipstone and Bevercotes came to an arrangement with the NUM to limit their numbers.[47] In Northumberland there was mass picketing involving one thousand pickets at Ashington and Ellington collieries over three days, which prevented all NACODS members from entering. The Northumberland NUM subsequently agreed to call off pickets until the end of the following week to give NACODS time to consider whether to join the strike. In Durham, there was significant picketing on two days, with eight picket lines of between fifty and two hundred miners, and NACODS officials were prevented from entering Washington Glebe colliery over two days though they managed to get in at four other pits.[48]

At Markham colliery, the largest in North Derbyshire, there was significant mass picketing on three days. Two hundred pickets prevented NACODS from gaining entry on Monday, and after a discussion on whether to defy the pickets they decided to go home and try again the next day. The Chief Constable reported that police numbers were sufficiently strong to see have them through but that NACODS had given three reasons for not entering: fears of reprisals at home; not wishing their actions to lead to the arrest of pickets; and not wishing their actions to lead to the police being assaulted. On Wednesday NACODS got through one hundred and twenty pickets with the assistance of sixty police officers, and on Friday picket numbers rose to around three hundred but NACODS managed to get through, though there were assaults on the police and a brick was thrown through an official's car window. Mass picketing took place at several other pits in the Area, with two hundred and fifty pickets at Usworth colliery and around one hundred and fifty each at another four pits. Pickets in Derbyshire introduced the tactic of stopping buses that transported officials to work: at Renishaw Park colliery one hundred and twenty pickets forcefully took control of a bus; at Pleasely colliery a bus was held up at the bus station; and at Ireland colliery

[47] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2-4 February 1972
[48] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Derbyshire and Durham, 31 January, Northumberland, 6 February; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2-4 February 1972

pickets prevented officials from changing buses in the town though they managed to get through in small numbers.[49]

In Wales, twelve cars carrying officials were reportedly attacked and damaged at Penrhiwceiber colliery after which NACODS members at three pits said they would not work under any conditions. The NACODS Area secretary persuaded them to continue working and all officials got through on the Friday in special transport provided by the Board. There continued to be a divergence in tactics between picket lines attempting to stop all officials and those restricting their numbers to pre-arranged limits. In North Nottinghamshire restricted numbers were allowed in at seven pits during the week; at Thoresby this amounted to fifty officials, which the NCB deemed sufficient but noted that 'there is no arrangement unless it is between NACODS and the pickets.'[50] In South Nottinghamshire restrictions were in operation at eight pits, and at another two the local NUM threatened officials to make such an arrangement or face heavy picketing. The officials reportedly replied that they would not make any arrangement that was contrary to the requirements of the pit concerned. In South Midlands restrictions continued at two collieries, and in Wales NACODS officials at Penrhiwceiber agreed to work under a restriction following heavy pressure from the pickets.[51]

### 6.10 Picketing of Officials - Week Five

Picketing eased off in week five with many Areas reporting only light picketing, though it continued to be militant and heavy in some places. Safety cover was reduced further in Lancashire and Durham, and the Yorkshire Area council passed a resolution asking the NEC to ban all safety work including that undertaken by NACODS.[52] In North Yorkshire there were over one hundred pickets at each of twenty sites including up to three hundred at Peckfield colliery, where they were reported to be strangers; the police subsequently concentrated

[49] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Derbyshire, 31 January; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2, 3 & 4 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[50] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2, 3 & 4 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.39-40
[51] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 2, 3 & 4 February 1972
[52] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 8-11 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/24, 8 February 1972

their forces at several collieries where NACODS then had some success at getting through. In contrast, in the south of the county, there was light picketing, and at just six sites, in Doncaster and Barnsley. In Wales picketing was focused at just three pits where NACODS either did not report for work, or were refused peaceful entry, and went home. In Durham picketing was light and well behaved, with only two or three pits being picketed and students joining a picket seventy to eighty strong at Seaham colliery. It was reportedly quiet everywhere in Northumberland and Northwestern with just one colliery in each Area being picketed in any numbers. Light picketing was also reported at pits in Staffordshire, and in Scotland the situation went from very light to virtually none by the end of the week. Picket numbers were down in North Derbyshire, South Wales and Staffordshire due to miners making their way to the mass picket of Nechells gasworks (Saltley), Birmingham, with the police, the DTI and the NCB reporting that pickets were going there in large numbers.[53]

Picketing to restrict NACODS numbers continued, particularly in the Midlands. One hundred and fifty pickets stopped officials from entering Bevercotes colliery, Nottinghamshire on Monday after which NACODS agreed to the restriction and just twenty-five men were then permitted in a twenty-four-hour period. NACODS continued to be restricted at nineteen other pits in the county. Restrictions also continued at three collieries in Derbyshire and at three in Leicestershire, where NACODS were required to sign in.[54] The NCB complained of a growing number of cases where NACODS and BACM members made little or no effort to pass the picket lines, reporting that at three North Yorkshire collieries officials made no real attempt, despite the small number of pickets. A meeting of the NACODS Panel in the Area decided, by a narrow margin, not to pass picket lines if the police were present. The NCB reported that it was subsequently difficult to assess whether this decision was being applied, but that there was considerable deterioration in the situation by Friday when thirteen pits had no NACODS officials and at only one of these could picketing be said to have been heavy. The Board concluded that no real attempt was made to enter whether police were present or not. In Barnsley there were over two hundred pickets at Darfield Main

[53] TNA: COAL/31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 3, 4, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 11 February; HO325/101, Telexes, South Wales and Durham, 14 February 1972

[54] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 11 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/24, 8 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

colliery where NACODS officials approached but then went home; a tactic decided at a meeting between management and NACODS on the Monday. NACODS subsequently did not attempt to go through any of the picket lines despite a small police presence.[55]

Picketing was heavy and militant in South Yorkshire during the week with fifteen hundred pickets in the Area on Monday and thirty-five pickets arrested on obstruction, breach of the peace, and damage to property charges at eight collieries. There were three hundred pickets and no police presence at Cadeby colliery, where a car was overturned and thirty officials entered the mine under a barrage of missiles, which smashed thirty windows in the pit yard. Pickets reportedly chased individual men within one mile of the colliery and officials including BACM personnel were attacked. At Cortonwood colliery over one hundred and fifty pickets chased officials into the village; four were knocked down and kicked and ten men were injured on the picket line before the police summoned reinforcements and took NACODS officials in to work. At Kilnhurst colliery police were in full strength, but a bonfire blocked the pit entrance and there were between one hundred and fifty and two hundred pickets who made threats to NACODS officials and their homes. On the approach roads to Manvers Main and New Stubbin collieries road blocks were assembled and defended by pickets, and at Silverwood colliery pickets prevented officials from entering the locker and lamp rooms, and there was street-fighting with pickets chasing deputies through the village. By the end of the week no NACODS were in at nine pits, of which at three they had said that they were not prepared to report for work unless police could guarantee their safety.[56]

On Wednesday 9 February the funeral was held for Fred Matthews, the picket killed by a lorry leaving Keadby power station, Lincolnshire. An estimated ten thousand people attended the funeral with miners coming from all over the country including representatives from every pit in Yorkshire. Some pickets appealed to NACODS members to respect the occasion and refrain from going to work, which received a mixed reaction. At Calverton colliery, Nottinghamshire

[55] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 11 February 1972

[56] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 11 February; *Morning Telegraph*, 8 & 9 February 1972, cited in Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.227; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.39-40

NACODS officials reorganised their shift times to work two twelve-hour shifts 'so as to leave the pit virtually empty for part of today out of respect', though reportedly 'this was without Management's prior knowledge.' However, NACODS went in in restricted numbers at twenty pits in Nottinghamshire and at ten pits in Derbyshire. In South Yorkshire only six NACODS went into work at Kiveton Park colliery following a massive but quiet demonstration, whereas at Manvers colliery 'NACODS refused to turn back peacefully, so bricks and turf were thrown and NACODS went home'. At six of the twenty-one pits in North Yorkshire NACODS passed the picket lines but at the majority of the others they went home.[57]

### 6.11 Picketing of Officials - Weeks Six and Seven

As the strike drew to a close, the NCB cited an improvement in picketing in week six but nevertheless a reluctance on behalf of NACODS officials to do any more than inspect the workings. They reported a general deterioration of conditions below ground and registered their concern that this would delay the resumption of normal working after the strike. Their assessment was that two hundred and fifty-seven faces (fifty-three percent) could start production within a week or so, two hundred and ten (forty-three percent) could not be productive within two weeks, and twenty (four percent) faced permanent closure.[58] In some Areas NACODS were being allowed in by pickets to deal with deterioration issues, though in others safety cover was further decreased with two collieries reducing to winding-engine men only, and three withdrawing safety cover completely. In East Wales there were no officials at work at four picketed collieries, having reported and then gone home. The West Wales Area conference requested an immediate national delegate conference to consider withdrawing all safety men and discussed limiting NACODS to weekends only.[59] This was rather late in the day to have been calling a conference to discuss such a move given that the strike was by then clearly in its final stages. Ezra had earlier noted that the CP-led Areas were the most disciplined in applying the Union directive to undertake maintenance cover, and this seems to have been a factor here for the Area

[57] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 9 February 1972; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, pp.56-7
[58] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/31, 18 February; PREM15/986, PRCS/32, 19-21 February 1972
[59] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Situation Reports, 14, 15 & 17 February 1972

leadership to appear more militant to its rank-and-file, whilst not actually doing anything substantial.[60]

The NACODS Yorkshire Area council met on Wednesday and decided that they would not seek police protection and would only enter the collieries if allowed to do so peacefully. Their members were instructed not to cross the picket lines if they met any resistance from pickets. Picketing in most parts of Yorkshire reduced as the week progressed but remained heavy in Doncaster, where officials were prevented entry at two thirds of the pits. There was heavy picketing at seven pits in Barnsley and up to two hundred pickets at fifteen pits in South Yorkshire with NACODS officials refused entry at half of them, including Silverwood colliery where miners were supported by students. In North Yorkshire there was only light picketing, and the NCB complained that NACODS had made a serious attempt to pass the pickets at just one colliery; pickets also kept out or restricted BACM staff at four collieries though the NCB believed that there appeared to have been no real attempt by them to get in to work either. In Durham there were four hundred pickets at each of three collieries and fifty at a fourth, though this generally diminished as the week progressed, as it did in North Derbyshire where NACODS officials were at work in all collieries by Wednesday. In Nottinghamshire light picketing ensured the continuance of restrictions at twenty pits, and NACODS were also limited at four pits in South Midlands and six in Yorkshire. In the final week of the strike, pickets were withdrawn from most collieries in most Areas with only slight variation. There was no picketing in Scotland or Kent, and pickets were withdrawn with NACODS officials in at all pits in Doncaster, Barnsley, Staffordshire, West Wales and Northwestern, and at all except two pits each in North and South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and East Wales. In Nottinghamshire pickets were withdrawn but NACODS remained restricted at sixteen pits. There were no pickets in the South Midlands except at Daw Mill, where the NUM provided some cover to help with an underground heating problem, or in Durham except at three pits including Herrington, where they were said to be there to congratulate NACODS for helping them during the strike.[61]

[60] LSE: Hetherington/19/25, Ezra, 27 January 1972
[61] TNA: PREM15/986, PRCS/32, 19-21 February; PRCS/35, 24 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 21 February 1972

## 6.12 Clerical Workers

The picketing of clerical workers had some similarities to the picketing of colliery officials, and there was some crossover as a proportion of the clerks operated within the collieries and depots. However, the majority of clerks worked in the various NCB offices at regional level and normally had little or no contact with the miners at work. Clerical workers in the industry were represented by two unions – COSA, affiliated to the NUM, and CAWU, which became known as APEX (Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs) shortly after the strike. As an affiliate section of the NUM, COSA were integral to the working of the Union; COSA general secretary Les Story sat on the NEC, and Sidney Ford, previous NUM president, had also emerged from COSA, and was known disparagingly as 'the office boy' for never having been a miner.[62] At nationalisation, the NUM had requested sole negotiating rights for clerical workers in the industry, within COSA, but the NCB declined this request for exclusivity and recognised CAWU and NACSS (National Association of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs - an affiliate of the TGWU) in addition to COSA. The matter was referred to the TUC but it was not properly resolved, as they recommended only that clerks at divisional level should be in COSA and that clerks at headquarters in CAWU. However, they made no recommendation for clerks at Area level or below, where the majority of clerks were employed. This led to both COSA and CAWU being represented at these levels and a degree of friction between them.[63] The contraction of the coal industry in the 1960s under the ACP, which saw a decrease in pits and miners, also led to a decline in the clerical workforce. Between 1964 and 1972, twenty percent of the NCB's clerical jobs were shed. There was a corresponding decline in trade union membership. COSA, which had increased its membership by eighty-one percent between 1948 and 1964, declined by twenty-one percent between 1964 and 1970. CAWU, in line with other purely white-collar clerical unions, increased its membership by seventeen percent in 1969 and twenty-four percent in 1970.[64]

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[62] Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.25

[63] Shaw, M.P., *The Cinderellas of industry: the occupational and trade union identity of clerical workers*, MPhil Thesis, Durham University, 1977, pp.101-2

[64] Bain, G.S., *The Growth of White Collar Unionism*, (Oxford, 1970) Table 3A.1, p 20; Lumley, R., *White Collar Unionism in Britain*, (London, 1973) p.16; Bain, G.S., '"Management and white collar unionism" in White Collar Unions - A Review,' *I.P.M. Information*, Report II, March 1972, p.10, all cited in Bowen, P., Elsy, V.E. & Shaw, M.P., 'The Attachment of White-Collar Workers to Trade Unions', *Personnel Review*, Vol.3, No.3, 1974, p.22

Two studies have considered clerical workers in the mining industry, in the period immediately after the 1972 strike.[65] There is a significant crossover between these studies, which involved the same researchers and the same NCB regional office, the Northern Area offices at Team Valley, Newcastle, the administrative headquarters covering the Northumberland and Durham coalfields. This was designated as 'Beta' in the first study and as 'Earth Control' in the second. It was described as being situated in an urban area at some distance from the pits and that its employees were not in close physical proximity to manual workers. The majority of its employees came from the Tyneside conurbation in which the offices were situated, though a sizeable minority were drawn from the smaller towns and villages of Northumberland and County Durham. There were eight hundred and ninety employees at the offices including four hundred and eighty-six clerical workers (forty-one percent male, fifty-nine percent female). These were divided amongst COSA (fifty-nine percent), CAWU (twenty-two percent) and non-union (nineteen percent).[66] The environmental reference groups of COSA clerks in the Beta survey were predominantly working-class in character, with the majority of their fathers being employed in skilled or semi-skilled manual work outside the mining industry. The clerks also chose to identify themselves predominantly (seventy-nine percent) as lower middle class or working-class.[67] In the Earth Control survey half the respondents considered themselves to be working class, one quarter lower middle class, and one eighth middle class. Clerks in this study defined the protective function of a union as being as important to them as its role as a negotiating body, though women saw its protective function as slightly more important than its negotiating function, and around a quarter of both defined trade unions as a fighting body.[68] In describing the disadvantage of union membership around a quarter of clerks chose the option of the 'possible demands for militant action', i.e. the fact that you might be expected to go on strike against your will.[69]

The contraction of the workforce in the 1960s led to some of the office services, formerly provided at the collieries, being moved to regional NCB offices like Team Valley. Technical changes, such as computerisation, had a considerable

[65] Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', pp.22-32; Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*
[66] Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', pp.29-30; Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*, pp.75 & 84-5
[67] Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', pp.29-30
[68] Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*, pp.195 & 229-30 incl Table 2
[69] Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*, Table 3, p.236

impact on NCB administration, not least on the adaptation of office services towards computers, and an increase in shift working, both of which added to the contraction of the clerical workforce. The Earth Control survey analysed the nature and extent of the clerical work undertaken at NCB offices, which was wide-ranging, and it described the following organisation and administrative functions; Computer Services (including data processing, systems planning), House Manager (internal services, typing, mail, file storage), Purchasing and Stores (stock control, invoicing, contracts), Regional Marketing (sales, distribution), Staff Department (industrial relations, wages), Superannuation (pensions), Workshop (technical services), Regional Solicitors, Regional Accounts, Internal Audit, Public Relations Office, Geological Services and Regional Scientific Control. The largest department was Regional Accounts with one hundred and fifty clerks employed, followed by House Manager and Computer Services with around one hundred clerks each. Computer Services also sold its services (for example, computer time, data preparation, technical expertise) to outside clients.[70] By 1966 clerical employment in Britain had become the most highly feminised occupational group, and women comprised almost seventy percent of all clerical employees.[71] The Earth Control study shows that the NCB clerical staff were predominantly female, but that women were overwhelmingly in the lowest pay grades. The grading structure for clerical workers in the study showed twelve different grades covering three broad job titles; clerical officers, computer assistants, and typists/machine operators. The bottom five grades (general clerical and the four typing grades), which had broadly similar wages, comprised fifty-four percent of the male clerks but eighty percent of the female clerks. The top three grades (clerical officer grade 1, and computer assistant grades 1 and 2), comprised twenty-two percent of the men and just two percent of the women, whilst the top grade itself (computer assistant grade 1) comprised one percent of both males and females, though this was just five employees.[72]

[70] Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*, pp.85-7 incl. Fig 4
[71] Bain, G.S. & Price, R., 'Union growth and employment trends in the UK, 1964-1970', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.10, No.3, November 1972, Table 10, p.378, cited in Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', p.24
[72] Shaw, *The Cinderellas of industry*, Table 5, p.87

### 6.13 Picketing of Clerical Workers - Weeks One and Two

In the 1972 dispute, COSA initially agreed to restrict overtime, along with the miners, and later to strike in support of the NUM's wage claim, which was for all grades of its membership including clerical staff. Before the official ballot on strike action the NEC requested that certain COSA members work during the strike to pay 'lying on wages' (wages owing to the miners for the week before the strike began), and organise supplementary benefits and tax rebates. After the COSA Area general council meeting in January, it was decided that the NEC be informed that COSA were 'insistent' upon a ballot on strike action and that if the NUM required certain non-industrial staff to work, 'they all would or none at all'. The NEC then advised the Area that this decision 'went beyond what was deemed necessary' and that there should be a minimum number of clerical workers detailed to work to conform to union policy. COSA members voted in the strike ballot overwhelmingly to remain at work. However, they were instructed to withdraw their labour in support of the NUM, and COSA informed the NEC that all clerical membership would do so from 15 January. Most COSA clerks remained on strike throughout the full period of the dispute, though approximately one-fifth of the membership left COSA during and after the strike in protest against the decision to withdraw their labour. Some of these attempted to join CAWU, whilst others became non-union members. Some of the ex-COSA members at Beta attempted to rejoin the COSA branch after the strike but were refused membership.[73] Nationally, about nine hundred COSA members attempted to join CAWU during the period of the strike,[74] though not all these were 'in protest', but rather that the option of membership of CAWU 'and a quiet life was more advantageous than membership of COSA'. The transfer of members became a source of future friction between the unions.[75] The CAWU NEC instructed its members not to enter offices if requested not to do so by NUM pickets, however, in a number of Areas, including the North East, some members ignored these instructions and continued to work.[76] This led to bitter exchanges between the pickets and CAWU clerks, and also between the officials of CAWU and those of COSA, with a COSA official claiming, 'CAWU must be cleared out

[73] Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', p.31
[74] *Northern Echo*, 26 January 1972, cited in Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', p.31
[75] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) p140
[76] Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', p.31

of the industry. They have no allegiance to coal. We feel we shouldn't be working beside people like this who regularly break picket lines and blissfully carry on their work as if nothing was happening.'[77]

The picketing of clerical workers began on the first day of the strike at NCB offices in Nottinghamshire, despite the clerks having been asked to remain in work. Picketing also took place that week at NCB regional headquarters at Anderton House, Lancashire and at Coleorton Hall, Leicestershire and at NCB offices in South Wales. At the end of the first week five hundred clerks at the coal industry research centre came out in solidarity action after a call from the pickets to support the strike.[78] On the Monday of week two Story noted, somewhat disingenuously, that COSA members had decided unanimously to join the miners, and twelve thousand five hundred came out on strike though a minority stayed in work as did most of the five thousand five hundred members of CAWU.[79] Picketing at NCB Area offices of those that remained in work expanded during the week, but largely without incident and a police presence was not deemed necessary at the offices in North Yorkshire or Northwestern. There continued to be peaceful picketing each day at Coleorton Hall and at the NCB offices in South Wales, however, in East Wales five hundred pickets physically prevented clerks from getting in to work, and only a handful of clerks managed to get to work at the North Derbyshire offices in Bolsover, though a police telex reports just two pickets.[80] CAWU clerks at seven pits in South Wales were persuaded to go home on the second Monday. However, they continued working in NCB Area offices at Tondu, Llanishen and Ystrad Hengoed/Mynach, where on Tuesday four hundred CAWU clerks turned up for work but went home after talks with the pickets, and then returned to work on Wednesday, before being turned back again on Friday. In Nottinghamshire, both NCB Area headquarters were picketed, with police assistance over three days required to get clerical staff to work through heavy picketing, including two hundred on the first day at Edwinstowe. In addition to the picketing of clerks at pits and NCB offices, clerks

[77] *Northern Echo*, February 1972, cited in Bowen et al, 'The Attachment of White-Collar', p.31
[78] *The Times*, 13 & 15 January; TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Lancashire, Leicester & Rutland and South Wales, 17 January 1972
[79] *Financial Times*, 13 & 17 January; *Guardian*, 24 January 1972; Francis, H. & Smith, D., *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1980) p.471
[80] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 21 January; HO325/101, Telexes, Leicester & Rutland, Derbyshire and South Wales, 24 January 1972

were also picketed at the central wages office in Pontardulais, West Wales, and at the NCB's national computer centre at Cannock in Staffordshire.[81]

The most significant picketing against clerical staff in week two took place over three days at the NCB's Doncaster Area headquarters, whose computer also did wage calculations and processing for other companies in the town. The staff manager sent two reports of the events, the first of which (19 January) alleged that threats were made to the clerks along the lines of 'you lot will be butchered tomorrow', and many of the female staff were reportedly distressed with two being sent home.[82] The following day one hundred pickets confronted one hundred police leading to a two-hour delay in getting the clerks into work.[83] The second report (21 January) was forwarded to Gormley as part of a formal complaint. It stated that some five to six hundred miners had attempted to stop clerical workers going to work that day. The pickets had emphasised that they were not in dispute with BACM managers, but rather only with the CAWU and COSA clerks, and that if CAWU members would support the strike then they would let the managers in. This offer was rejected and the managers reportedly chose not to leave the clerks (many of whom were 'young girls') exposed to the pickets alone. The police subsequently led the clerical staff through the angry picket line, some two hundred yards long, where they were subject to obscenities and abuse and some were reportedly kicked, punched or spat upon. Subsequently almost every female member of staff reportedly collapsed in tears, were hysterical or otherwise physically distressed, and were given 'first aid' treatment (hot drinks and tranquillisers).[84] Reports by two pickets point to some provocation by the office staff, and also by the police. The first claims that, despite the presence of BBC and ITN cameramen, police were discretely kicking the pickets, but that this was not recorded or shown by the television crews who focused instead on the hostile attitude of the pickets towards the 'girls. Both pickets allege that, on the first day, CAWU workers inside the building poured tea leaves and hot tea out of the high windows on to the pickets (when there were about sixty of them). On the

[81] TNA: LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix 1, pp.2-3; TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; HO325/101, Telexes, Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent, 17 January; Nottinghamshire, 24 January; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

[82] TNA: COAL31/383, Report, Marsh to Straw, 19 January; HO 325/101, Letter, Hilary to Wright, 21 January 1972

[83] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972

[84] TNA: COAL78/1906, Letter, Shephard to Gormley, 21 January; HO325/101, Letter, Hilary to Wright, 21 January; COAL31/383, Report, Marsh to Straw, 19 January; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

second day there were about two hundred pickets, and there were reportedly a lot of women who had joined the pickets. Then the police came, and the office staff inside the building were making the 'V-sign' at the pickets and telling them 'Take yer hook and go down the hole where you belong, you rats'. The third day there were about one thousand pickets, and the police escorted them through, and there was spitting and kicking and pushing.[85]

Gormley responded by deprecating the incidents and enclosing, with his reply to the Board, a copy of an NUM circular entitled 'Instructions to Pickets' sent out to the Area secretaries the previous day. Given that the NUM circular and the NCB's complaint have the same date it is not clear whether the former was in direct response to the latter or would have been dispatched in any regard.[86] The assistant Chief Constable of Doncaster, who was in charge of policing on that day, appeared to disagree with the NCB version of events and gave a different account of the incident to Yorkshire Television stating that: 'The behaviour of the strike pickets today has been splendid. I have nothing but praise for them'.[87] A Security Service report noted that the local police were shaken by the incident and alleged that the trouble was caused by Trotskyist militants of the Socialist Labour League (SLL).[88] This report draws on an article from *The Times*, which mentions Trotskyists, but does not mention the SLL specifically, or indeed any political party. Given the widespread militant picketing of clerical and safety workers throughout the country, and throughout the strike, and the lack of any other mention of Trotskyists in this regard, it seems unlikely that the aggressive action here was led or instigated by them, though they may well have been present. Rather a combination of provocation, and pre-existing feelings of contempt towards those who cross picket lines, made the miners fell that their hostility was legitimate and justified.

### 6.14 Picketing of Clerical Workers - Weeks Three to Seven

The picketing of clerical workers expanded and became more militant during week three, and included some clerks picketing others who were still in work.

[85] Cited in Geary, R., *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985*, (Cambridge, 1985) p.72
[86] TNA: COAL26/404, Letter, Gormley to Shephard, 22 January 1972
[87] HC Deb, 2 March 1972, vol.832 c.728
[88] TNA: HO325/101, Letter, Hilary to Wright, 21 January; *The Times*, January 20 1972

Doncaster NCB headquarters was again the subject of a mass picket with police helping clerical staff past one hundred and fifty pickets. NUM leaders repeated their call for this sort of picketing to stop and miners then apparently desisted with the police reporting that 'trouble at NCB Doncaster appears to have subsided'. However, local COSA leaders voted to continue the picketing.[89] There was heavy picketing at both NCB Area offices in Durham, with between fifty and one hundred each day at Whitburn, and picketing over three days at Team Valley, with police escorting forty-nine staff through two hundred pickets on the second day, before a minimal picket on the third.[90] In Lancashire, there were a dozen pickets at Anderton House and the NCB reported that 'a coach load of COSA pickets' toured all the depots in the Area to persuade members still working to stop, but that they only received a response at Ratcliffe depot where some joined the strike. The Board considered the effects of the COSA strike to have been negligible, with just four out of one hundred and thirty offices closed, though it continued to refer to the dispute on its internal documentation as 'NUM/COSA strike'.[91]

Shephard wrote to Gormley to complain of the aggressive picketing of clerical workers and cited angry scenes outside the Scottish North Area offices at Alloa that morning when around three hundred pickets confronted staff.[92] In the process cars were reportedly damaged and six of the female employees were treated for shock, with one receiving medical attention for bruised ribs after being pushed against a fence. Shephard also noted that one hundred pickets had jostled staff entering the NCB offices in Tondu, Glamorgan that morning, despite a police presence, and that one 'girl' had been treated for shock and another for a foot injury. The following day police escorted clerical staff through three hundred pickets at Tondu, and the South Wales NUM leadership called for such picketing to be stopped, after which it was reduced to a minimum with no further incidents reported. Local police confirmed that clerks had been jostled over two days at Tondu that week, but reported that they had received no complaints from any source and that no arrests had been made. The police and South Wales NUM both

[89] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January; HO325/101, Telex, West Yorkshire, 24 January 1972
[90] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 24 & 31 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/14, 27 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February 1972
[91] TNA: COAL31/300, Marketing Reports, 28 January, 18 & 25 February; COAL31/383, Marketing Report, 11 February 1972
[92] DTI Post-mortem cites c.400

blamed 'militants from other areas, including strikers who did not belong to the mining industry'.[93] The DTI cited a police report which suggested that the 'press have exaggerated the incidents arising out of picketing of offices in Wales and the North East.'[94]

The allegations of infiltration of the picket lines in Tondu echoes Gormley's allegations earlier in the week of similar infiltration in Durham. It is unclear who might have been responsible, or who was being blamed, or indeed whether infiltration actual took place at all. In terms of whom may have been in the frame, Gormley's allegations implied that whoever was infiltrating also had the ability to influence television reporters to attend. He further linked his allegations to blaming the Board for its attempts to manipulate public opinion by issuing misleading photographs. This would appear to imply that Gormley was accusing the Board of having some influence over those who were accused of infiltrating the picket and therefore of it using *agents provocateurs*, which would be quite some allegation. In the earlier events at Doncaster NCB offices during week two, allegations were made by the press and security services that Trotskyist activists had infiltrated the picket, but there does not seem to be any sense of that here, and it seems unlikely that they would be able to call on television crews to attend. Students were also known to have been present on a number of picket lines, and could perhaps have been responsible here. It is recorded that they were generally less disciplined in their approach than were the miners, and this is discussed further in Chapter Eight. It would, though, not seemingly be in the interest of supporters of the miners, whether left wing activists or students, to call on television or the media to record scenes of picket aggression. There were allegations made later in the strike, in respect to the confrontation at Saltley, of the use of undercover agents posing as miners who infiltrated the mass picket (discussed in Chapter Ten), which would lend credence to the potential use of such agents in the events at Durham or Tondu.

The picketing of clerical workers eased off in week four, though there were still some large and militant picket lines. In Durham, the offices at Whitburn had just

[93] TNA: COAL78/1906, Letter, Shephard to Gormley, 25 January; COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; HO325/101, Telex, South Wales, 31 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January; PRCS/13, 26 January; PRCS/14, 27 January; PRCS/17, 31 January; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972

[94] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/18, 1 February 1972

three pickets on the Monday, after the heavy picketing the previous week, but there were one hundred pickets at Team Valley. At Coventry colliery pickets stopped all vehicles from entering with clerical workers refused entry and safety staff only allowed in after some difficulty.[95] There was a mass picket at the NCB offices in Ystrad Hengoed, Glamorgan where only one third of the clerks got through and, according to the DTI post-mortem, some were pushed and had their hair pulled. The deputy Chief Constable of Wales reported that the problem was that, as at many places, police had come to an amicable arrangement with the pickets but that picket numbers were then augmented by militant flying squads who caught the police short-handed. This was then further aggravated by a number of the female employees, who, having seen their colleagues escorted through the picket lines, decided that they would also like to go to work and this consequently divided the police strength. He stated that: 'No police officers saw girls' hair being pulled and no complaints had been received from any of the girls.'[96]

The picketing of clerks reduced in week five, as the strike began to draw to a close, but there were two dozen pickets at various times at the NCB offices in Whitburn, Durham and also picketing at Coventry colliery and Emley Moor colliery, Barnsley. COSA members also picketed CAWU clerks in Wales.[97] In Scotland the NUM threatened to withdraw safety cover entirely at Monkton Hall and Bilston Glen collieries unless COSA members still at work were withdrawn.[98] In week six, heavy picketing was reported at the NCB's pension and insurance centres in Cardiff, whilst Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire and Team Valley, Durham were also picketed, with COSA clerks at the latter picketing against non-unionised clerks working inside.[99] In week seven, some clerks in Yorkshire, South Wales and Northwestern returned to work but the majority remained on strike.[100]

[95] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Warwickshire and Durham, 31 January 1972
[96] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June; HO325/101, Letter, Stevenson to McQueen, 1 February 1972
[97] TNA: COAL/31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 3, 4, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation Report, 11 February; HO325/101, Telexes, South Wales and Durham, 14 February 1972
[98] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Situation Reports, 11 February 1972
[99] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Situation Reports, 14, 15, 17 & 18 February; HO325/101, Telex, Durham, 14 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[100] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 25 February 1972

## 6.15 Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that the widespread disregard for the national directives on maintenance and safety cover shown by the pickets reflected a deep anger and frustration that had built-up over the preceding period, in particular pit closures and the rationalisation of wages. The national leadership of the NUM were implicated in these processes, which could explain why much of the frustration expressed by the pickets was in defiance of the leadership's directives. This defiance built upon similar attitudes that began during the overtime ban preceding the strike, when miners began to refuse to undertake safety cover. The decision to withhold safety cover was in part a negotiating tactic, in that the miners' attitude was that if the NCB and the Government cared so much about the deteriorating condition of the pits then they should meet the wage demand. However, the picketing of safety and clerical staff was not essentially due to the type of work that was being undertaken by them but rather was aimed primarily at their role as strike-breakers. This is particularly underlined by the picketing of clerical workers, which in itself had no real negotiating element. Also, the picketing against maintenance work primarily focused on NACODS officials rather than BACM managers (who get sparse mention in the records), implying miners' identification of a struggle against those within their own community or class, which is true to a certain extent of the picketing against clerical workers.

The pickets apparent lack of concern for the state of the pits, or the possibility of their deterioration, seems to reflect a realistic view of an industry in decline, which was contracting even when maintenance was undertaken, and miners were compliant and restrained. Consequently, a smaller industry paying better wages was perhaps an attractive prospect to many miners, who had not seen the benefits of their restraint and consequently had little stake in maintaining the pits on behalf of the Board. The variety of approaches to the picketing of officials and clerical workers, both within and between Areas, points to decision-making taking place locally rather than at national level. In this regard, the leadership of the union did not *lead* the strike, but rather responded to pressure from below as a means of containing the anger and frustration of the militant element. The way in which the picketing unfolded in a particular locality was a response to what appeared to work in that locality, coloured by the relative level of militancy and frustration, and the response they received from the officials and the clerks. Small scale and

peaceful picketing were arguably preferable for everybody and indeed this worked in many locations, but not in all. In the latter, picketing became more militant or larger scale, or both, in order to be more effective and to achieve the desired aim. In some places, a militant attitude achieved results early in the dispute and this became the form that was used throughout the strike. In others, mass picketing when combined with demands to restrict numbers achieved its purpose, and these restrictions then continued throughout the dispute.

As the strike developed, NACODS own response reflected decisions taken locally with officials in some localities continuing to attempt to cross picket lines in accordance with their national guidelines, but in an increasing number of localities NACODS officials turned back at the first sign of resistance. This presumably reflects a preference not to have to confront the pickets' anger on a daily basis and perhaps some sympathy for the miners' cause. There was presumably also an awareness that they would all soon be back down the pits together, and therefore decisions were taken for the sake of future harmony. The Board's exasperation at the apparent lack of determination by some officials to pass the picket lines reflected its own frustration at the progress of the strike, with the attendant loss of equipment, production and revenue.

# Chapter 7

## Coal Stocks and Priority Supply

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the stocks of distributed coal and the supply of fuel to priority and vulnerable consumers during the dispute. The overtime ban preceding the strike had made significant inroads into the NCB's stocks with a loss of production of around five million tons, though the NCB nevertheless felt itself well prepared and able to withstand a strike primarily because it had stocked up previously such that when the ban began it had over thirty-four million tons, some eight million more than at the same point in the previous year.[1] The chapter shows that the power stations, as the main consumers of coal and the main priority for the Government, were thought to have sufficient stocks to last around eight weeks and most commentators believed that the strike would be over prior to this. The main problem for the NCB and the electricity generating boards was that their calculations had assumed a degree of coal transportation being available to them during the strike, since not all stocks were where they would be needed. The chapter will show that the success of the picketing in stranding these stocks led to a steady downward revision of the timescale and ultimately to power cuts as many power stations ran short, some of these quite quickly. The supply of coal to priority consumers was a major issue for all sides in the dispute and played a role in the manipulation of public opinion. It became a key battleground, both between the NCB and the Government on the one side, and the NUM on the other, but also between the NUM leadership and the miners on the picket lines. The chapter will show that there were differing views about what was considered a priority, both

[1] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

in terms of practical need and available coal supplies, but also at a local level. Miners were not keen to release pit-head stocks for priority use where there was a suspicion that stocks were being distributed by merchants to non-priority consumers. Schools became a significant area of dispute, with each side holding somewhat fluid views on whether they should be considered a priority, but with the pickets largely believing it important to keep them open.

## 7.2 Coal Stocks at the Outset

There were approximately nineteen million tons of distributed coal stocks at the beginning of the strike, including over fourteen million tons at the power stations. Stocks were higher than usual for the time of year, due to several factors: the winter had been milder than usual; big consumers of coal had been advised by Lord Robens, prior to his stepping down as NCB chairman, that a strike was coming and that they should therefore stockpile;[2] and in addition three and a half million tons had been imported from Australia and America, in preparation for the strike. The NCB advised that it had enough stocks to last around eight weeks. However, the stocks at power stations were unevenly distributed with relatively high stocks in Scotland and the south of England, but an average of just seven weeks supply at power stations in the north and the midlands, which normally accounted for around eighty percent of CEGB burn.[3] Almost three quarters of total output from the CEGB's one hundred and forty-two power stations was produced by coal or dual coal/oil fired stations, and a disproportionate number of the very large fuel-efficient power stations were supplied by rail and were situated in or near the Yorkshire coalfield. These supplied nearly seventeen percent of total CEGB capacity compared to just three percent of national capacity in East Anglia,[4] which drew more attention in the commentary on the strike due to the presence in the region of 'flying pickets' from Yorkshire. The first three weeks of the strike, superficially, had little impact on the stocks; temperatures were above normal and power station consumption was maintained. Total distributed stocks at the end of this period were still marginally higher than they had been at the same point in the previous year, but the successful picketing, which prevented

[2] King, C., *The Cecil King diary, 1970-1974*, (London, 1975) p.186
[3] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.185
[4] Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) pp.219-21

the CEGB from being able to transfer stocks from one power station to another, led it to reassess its 'effective' as opposed to total stocks of coal; at the end of this period effective stocks were put at 6.4 million tons (around four weeks' supply) as 1.7 million tons could not, by then, be utilised.[5] By 27 January, towards the end of the third week, two small power stations in England had already closed and one in Scotland was expected to close the following week.[6]

**Table 7.1. Distributed Coal Stocks, 1972 (Million tons).**[7]

| Week Ended | Strike Week | Power Stations | Coke Ovens | Industry | Domestic | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 08 Jan | - | 14.28 | 1.59 | 1.43 | 1.25 | 18.97 |
| 15 Jan | 1 | 12.84 | 1.37 | 1.30 | 1.09 | 16.94 |
| 22 Jan | 2 | 11.37 | 1.21 | 1.09 | 0.85 | 14.77 |
| 29 Jan | 3 | 9.63 | 1.05 | 0.91 | 0.63 | 12.38 |
| 05 Feb | 4 | 7.69 | 0.92 | 0.74 | 0.45 | 9.92 |
| 12 Feb | 5 | 6.14 | 0.78 | 0.60 | 0.32 | 7.93 |
| 19 Feb | 6 | 5.40 | 0.64 | 0.51 | 0.23 | 6.86 |
| 26 Feb | 7 | 5.41 | 0.69 | 0.47 | 0.20 | 6.87 |
| 04 Mar | - | 6.01 | 0.86 | 0.50 | 0.21 | 7.71 |
| 11 Mar | - | 6.54 | 1.01 | 0.56 | 0.22 | 8.47 |
| 18 Mar | - | 7.38 | 1.19 | 0.63 | 0.27 | 9.65 |
| 25 Mar | - | 8.45 | 1.36 | 0.74 | 0.34 | 11.12 |

**Table 7.2. Total Inland Coal Consumption, 1972 (Million tons).**[8]

| Week Ended | Strike Week | Power Stations* | Coke Ovens | Industry* | Domestic* | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 08 Jan | - | 1.73 | 0.32 | 0.27 | 0.37 | 3.01 |
| 15 Jan | 1 | 1.78 | 0.22 | 0.26 | 0.30 | 2.79 |
| 22 Jan | 2 | 1.72 | 0.19 | 0.23 | 0.25 | 2.59 |
| 29 Jan | 3 | 1.74 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.22 | 2.53 |
| 05 Feb | 4 | 1.82 | 0.15 | 0.20 | 0.18 | 2.47 |
| 12 Feb | 5 | 1.42 | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.12 | 1.94 |
| 19 Feb | 6 | 0.91 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 1.30 |
| 26 Feb | 7 | 0.86 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.07 | 1.24 |
| 04 Mar | - | 1.02 | 0.26 | 0.15 | 0.14 | 1.75 |
| 11 Mar | - | 1.28 | 0.33 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 2.31 |
| 18 Mar | - | 1.07 | 0.38 | 0.21 | 0.22 | 2.21 |
| 25 Mar | - | 0.84 | 0.40 | 0.22 | 0.26 | 2.03 |

* Excluding Northern Ireland
Notes: 1) Industry includes consumers of 1,000 tons or more per annum
2) Domestic includes house coal, anthracite and dry steam coal

[5] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[6] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 2nd Meeting, 26 January 1972
[7] Source: TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[8] Source: TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

## 7.3 Dwindling Supplies

As the NUM began to disrupt the flow of oil to power stations, which were conserving coal by burning extra oil, the CEGB and Scottish Electricity Generating Board (SEGB) used alternative fuels to a maximum, and therefore managed to conserve their coal stocks using about eighty percent of normal consumption, but nevertheless many power stations had exhausted their supplies by the start of February.[9] In the fourth week of the strike the weather turned colder during a three-day spell (30 January to 1 February), which led to a surge in demand for electricity. This in turn caused an increase in both power station coal burn and the electricity sent out to consumers. Other sectors, including industrial and domestic, reduced their consumption but total inland consumption remained at 2.5 million tons per week. Total power station stocks fell by 2 million tons to 7.7 million tons (a little over four weeks' supply) but since the CEGB's 'blocked' stocks increased to 2.5 million tons, effective stocks were down to 3.8 million tons (only two and a half weeks' supply).[10] The Home Office debated whether it should authorise the release of two hundred Ministry of Defence (MOD) generators to hospitals that did not have their own emergency equipment, and whether the Department for the Environment should issue over three hundred generators, which it had in store, to priority customers. The Home Office reasoned that the public would consider this a sensible precaution, and that the Departments should therefore be authorised to go ahead though it cautioned that the MOD generators would be delivered by soldiers in uniform, and so some publicity would be unavoidable.[11]

During the fifth week, a State of Emergency was declared, and the Wilberforce Court of Inquiry was appointed. Electricity sent out by the CEGB dropped below the pre-strike rate for the first time, and total consumption of coal fell from 2.5 million tons per week to 2 million tons as power stations reduced their burn.[12] Coal stocks at power stations as at 7 February was down to 6.1 million tons - of this 2.75 million tons were 'not immediately available', comprising excessive stocks at Aberthaw, Didcot and Tilbury 'B' power stations, plus 'carpet losses'

[9] KL: KA25/U/Z5, NUM Conference 1972, NEC Report, pp.8-9
[10] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972; KL: KA25/U/Z5, NUM Conference 1972, NEC Report, p.9
[11] TNA: HO325/101, Letter, Allen to Departmental list, 1 February 1972
[12] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

at all stations without concreted stocking ground. Effectively, by 9 February, one month into the strike, the CEGB had 3.25 million tons of accessible stock, representing two weeks burn if it were evenly distributed. However, stocks were by then badly out of balance and several major power stations had already had to reduce their burn due to a shortage of coal. A complete shutdown was then only days away at some big Midlands power stations - Ratcliffe, Willington, High Marnham, and Rugeley - and the timing of the first power cuts was then dependent on the weather, given the mild spell at the time. By the end of that week the CEGB's effective stocks were 2.5 million tons (only one and a half weeks' supply).[13]

### 7.4 Power Cuts

The initial, unplanned, power cuts occurred on 10 February, with power reductions of nine to ten per cent introduced the following day. The NCB envisaged that these would have to be increased to twenty per cent reductions after one week, to thirty per cent a week later and to about forty per cent in the third week, i.e. by the end of February. The Government intended to ban electricity for advertising and floodlighting within a few days, and to spread the available power supplies evenly around the country after taking priority supplies into account. The amount of electricity consumption amongst consumer categories was, at that time, in the following proportions:

| | |
|---|---|
| Industrial | 41.6% |
| Domestic | 38.0% |
| Commercial | 15.1% |
| Combined Commercial/Domestic | 1.5% |
| Farms | 1.7% |
| Traction | 1.3% |
| Public Lighting | 0.8% |

Priority consumers included essential users such as hospitals, gas and water supplies, sewage pumping and also transport, since British Rail relied entirely on

[13] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Marketing Report, 11 February 1972

CEGB for electric traction. The London Underground, though, had two of its own power stations, and so was not affected. Priority users also, ironically, included collieries, due to the need for pumping and ventilation safety measures. The NCB correctly made the point that, since the initial emergency regulations would make it illegal for only a very small proportion of commercial categories to use electricity, these savings would do very little to reduce overall demand, and neither would a ban on public lighting, which would be the next obvious measure.[14] Drastic electricity cuts were imposed on industrial and domestic consumers from week six onwards. Total coal consumption was down to forty-five percent of the pre-strike level, and electricity sent out was thirty percent down on the level of two weeks earlier. Industry was seriously affected and by the end of the week 1.6 million workers had been laid off. Crude steel production fell to sixty percent of the pre-strike level, and power station stocks fell to 4.4 million tons with effective stocks of about 2 million tons. The final week of the strike was a transitional one; the Wilberforce Court of Inquiry reported on 18 February, and although the miners were not back at work, and therefore not producing more coal, pickets were withdrawn in many places and coal was able to move from imported and pit-head stocks. The supplies proved to be just sufficient to meet the low consumption of 1.2 million tons and so the drain on distributed stocks was halted.[15]

**Table 7.3. Coal Dispute Stocks Summary (Million tons).**[16]

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Loss of output: | | | |
| Overtime ban | 1/11/1971 to 8/1/1972 | 5 | |
| Strike | 9/1/1972 to 26/2/1972 | 19.5 | |
| Recovery period | 27/2/1972 to 25/3/1972 | 1.5 | |
| Total loss of output | 1/11/1971 to 25/3/1972 | 26 | |
| | | | |
| Reduction in consumption due to the strike | | 10 | |
| Additional imports because of the strike | | 1 . | |
| Total 'savings' of coal | 1/11/1971 to 25/3/1972 | 11 | |
| | | | |
| Net loss of coal because of the dispute | | 15 | |
| | | | |
| Total coal stocks at | 30/10/1971 | 34.6 | (26.3 in 1970) |
| Total coal stocks at | 25/3/1972 | 18.5 | (19.8 in 1971) |
| Total stock change | | -16.1 | (-6.5 in 1971) |

[14] TNA: COAL31/383, NCB Marketing Report, 11 February 1972
[15] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[16] Source: TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

## 7.5 Priority Supplies

Domestic and industrial supply of coal for general use largely ceased as the strike began, though the miners were aware of the need to maintain supplies to emergency and priority consumers, and the issue of releasing priority coal became crucial in the battle over public opinion. A circular sent out by Daly to the NUM regions on 30 December stated that 'essential supplies were to be maintained to, for example, hospitals'.[17] The question of what was considered to be a priority exposed divisions between the NUM leadership and the membership, since the miners in South Wales and Yorkshire also immediately began allowing coal to be released to schools, against the directive of the NEC.[18] The DTI's own list of priority categories of domestic and essential public service consumers did not include schools, and was as follows:

A) All households which depend solely on solid fuel for cooking.
B) Those in the following health risk categories: i) households consisting only of elderly persons, or where elderly persons are left alone for most of the day; ii) maternity cases booked for home delivery or early discharge after hospital confinement; iii) families with children below school age; iv) the chair bound or bedfast, sick or physically handicapped, and those whose mobility is severely impaired by virtue of handicap such as circulatory disease; v) other households where the need for warmth has been verified by a doctor or local authority.
C) Health and welfare services including for example hospitals, clinics, residential homes for the elderly and handicapped, etc, which rely on solid fuel.
D) Essential public services (e.g. sewerage works) still dependent on solid fuel.[19]

As with all aspects of picketing during the strike, decisions surrounding the release of priority supplies were taken by local branches and by the pickets themselves at each picketed site, and consequently varied considerably in part due to the availability of coal locally. The NCB and the NUM both saw the continuation of priority supplies as critical but also sought to blame each other for failing to allow it. Internal NCB correspondence during the first three weeks of the strike shows that it sought information from its regions concerning unmet

[17] McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) p.202
[18] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January 1972
[19] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

priority requests, the proportion of schools that had closed, and later also daily reports of the locations of hospitals, retirement homes and other welfare institutions which were in jeopardy.[20] Perhaps expecting the miners to withhold all supplies, the police telexes record several instances of priority coal being released under the supervision of pickets.[21]

By the end of the third week, efforts to reach an agreement between the NCB and NUM for release of stocks from Butlerfield site near Edinburgh, which had over forty thousand tons of fuel, had failed. Similar efforts at the Clock Face stocking site in St. Helens had also failed, though an agreement was reached to supply around one hundred and fifty tons per day from Templemewsom opencast site in Yorkshire to supplement dwindling stocks at Barnsley Main and Howroyd depots for supply to priority customers. Coal stocks and the flow of coal for priority use remained good in Yorkshire, whilst the situation in the Midlands had deteriorated with pickets stopping domestic priority supply from Hilton Main depot and Silverdale landsale in Staffordshire, and from Whitwick landsale in the South Midlands. Movement of all supplies from Glentaggart in Scotland had ceased entirely, whilst only twenty tons of coal remained at Niddrie depot in Edinburgh, which was to be reserved for domestic priority use only, with a maximum of one hundredweight per customer. In South Wales, the prospects looked better with pickets agreeing to the release of coal from Nantgarw, Bargoed and Penlan depots within a few days.[22] In the fourth week pickets in the North East refused to allow coal to be released to three residential estates 'despite official NUM approval' to do so.[23]

During the third and fourth weeks, the NCB undertook an assessment of supplies available to different categories of coal consumers. For domestic consumption, it found that there were still good stocks of coal south of a line between Bristol and The Wash for supply to all consumers (including non-priority), sufficient for another three to four weeks, but that there were virtually no stocks available north of this line for non-priority consumers and already difficulties in some areas in keeping priority consumers supplied. Local strike committees were co-operating

[20] TNA: COAL78/1903, Memo, Barratt to NCB Regional Marketing Directors, 12 January; Memo, Lane to NCB Regional Marketing Directors, 27 January 1972
[21] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Durham, 17 January; Gwynedd, 14 January; Derbyshire, 31 January; Cumbria, 6 & 14 February 1972
[22] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 28 January 1972
[23] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/20, 3 February 1972

in releasing priority supplies through picket lines at the pit-head and opencast sites. However, in Derbyshire, Northumberland and East Wales, strike committees were less co-operative.[24] During the fifth week the NCB reported that pickets at Killoch and Littlemill pits in Scottish South Area had begun stopping priority coal supply to hospitals and pensioners.[25] At the end of the following week, in the last days of the strike, the NCB reported that there was no slackening of picketing with pickets still applying their own concept of priorities, which was much narrower than the Ministry's list. Pickets were also continuing to insist on only one or two hundredweight deliveries (providing that lorry crews were union members). In the Northwestern region, an agreement was reached between the NCB and the NUM Area Executive to redistribute stocks from the Clock Face stocking site to other local sites where the stocks were exhausted, however local pickets would still not agree to allow this.[26]

### 7.6 Coal Merchants

During the third week of the strike a DTI report noted that South Wales Coal Merchants Federation had reported that its members in Newport, North Monmouthshire, Rhondda, Aberdare and Bargoed: 'will make no further deliveries to priority consumers, even where they still have small stocks, because pickets in the area are now intercepting deliveries at merchants' yards.' The report noted that this was academic in view of the very small stocks left but that the interceptions were perhaps due to the pickets' suspicion that coal may be being brought into the area 'as we know may well be the case'. It also noted that the NCB expected similar trouble soon in South Lancashire and in those urban areas of Yorkshire where supplies were low unless the NUM and the local pickets agreed to release coal.[27] At the end of that week, a DTI report noted that pickets in several regions were not following 'the generally accepted line' by withholding priority coal 'even to hospitals' in protest at the non-supply by the NCB of in-arrears concessionary coal to miners (which was effectively a long-established part of their wages).[28]

[24] TNA: FV 38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[25] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 9 February 1972
[26] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 18 February 1972
[27] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/13, 26 January 1972
[28] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/15, 28 January 1972

In addition to attempting to ensure that priority needs were met the NUM were also keen to ensure that no coal was released except for priority use. At the end of the third week of the strike Daly wrote to the Coal Merchants Federation of Great Britain (CMFGB) to complain about some coal merchants not abiding by the guidelines set out by both the NUM and the Government for coal supplies to priority customers. Daly warned that in future, merchants might be stopped from supplying even priority cases if deliveries to non-priority categories persisted and suggested the following procedure: deliveries to priority groups would be allowed to continue; such deliveries would require a certificate of authenticity concerning the nature and destination of the fuel; if deemed necessary by the picket organiser delivery lorries may be accompanied by an NUM member; a further certificate would be signed by the merchant at the delivery point to confirm the need.[29] Early the following week Daly sent a letter to Social Services Secretary Sir Keith Joseph referring to his letter to the CMFGB and noting that no reply had been received. He informed Joseph that in the event that merchants were unable to supply these groups, people would be contacting the DSS for assistance and that he should therefore inform doctors of the NUM's concern and tell them that they should contact their local NUM Area secretary who would assist doctors in obtaining coal to ensure the warmth and help of the priority groups.[30] The CMFGB reply to Daly a week later noted that it was not a party to the dispute, that it had no control over its nine thousand member firms, but that these firms would continue to serve their customers and fulfil their obligation to provide coal to priority consumers.[31]

### 7.7 Schools

After the pickets released coal to schools during the first week the NCB noted that this was 'an unexpectedly relaxed attitude on the part of men in some areas (notably Yorkshire)'.[32] The DTI observed that: 'Only one or two hundred out of many thousands of schools are coal heated.' But they soon amended this to report that in fact nearly half of thirty thousand schools were coal-heated, but that under

[29] TNA: COAL78/1905, Letter, Daly to Coal Merchants Federation of Great Britain (CMFGB), 28 January 1972
[30] TNA: COAL31/383, Letter, Daly to Joseph, 31 January 1972
[31] TNA: COAL78/1905, Letter, CMFGB to Daly, 9 February 1972
[32] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January 1972,

half of one per cent were presently in difficulty.[33] The Government itself was immediately suspicious of the pickets allowing coal for schools, seeing this manoeuvre by the miners as an 'unexpected early headline story' and noting that the publicity achieved for the plight of schools was obviously helpful to their image but that schools are not a priority of life and health of the community in a full emergency. Towards the end of the first week of the strike, the NUM leadership began considering 'whether to add schools to priorities they could recognise', given the fact that the miners on the picket lines were already allowing this to happen.[34] Daly's statement of 21 January subsequently included schools on the list of priority consumers, though the attitude of miners locally continued to vary from day to day and locality to locality.[35]

The first primary schools closed during the first week of the strike when miners in Ayrshire reportedly refused supply to schools despite plentiful stocks of priority coal.[36] Supply to schools in Ayrshire began early in the second week following discussions with the local NUM.[37] In this episode, Ayrshire pickets were initially strictly applying national guidelines, unlike many miners in other Areas, and this is perhaps accounted for by the more disciplined adherence to Union control of the CP leadership, which was raised later by Ezra,[38] in containing any wayward militancy. Schools subsequently began to close in Yorkshire and South Wales and a DTI report noted that the number of closures was still small but that larger numbers were expected the following week in East Glamorgan, including twenty-three in Rhondda. The report also noted that these closures could affect the number of mothers who would have to stay at home, which could affect local industries and therefore miners' family incomes, and also that school closures would mean that school-meals would normally stop.[39] These comments appear to imply that as these schools were almost entirely in coal mining areas school closures would increase pressure on miners' families. Whether this was stated from a position of concern or strategic interest is unclear. Schools in mining Areas, and indeed priority consumers in general, were more at risk of supplies running out than their equivalents in other regions of the country,

[33] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January; PRCS/2 13 January; PRCS/3, 14 January 1972
[34] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/2, 13 January; PRCS/3, 14 January; PRCS/4, 15-16 January 1972
[35] TNA: COAL78/1906, Daly to Area Secretaries, Circular AS35/72, 21 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/6, 18 January 1972
[36] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/3, 14 January 1972
[37] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/6, 18 January 1972
[38] LSE: Hetherington/19/25, Ezra, 27 January 1972
[39] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/8, 20 January 1972

because merchants in coal-producing areas were not obliged to hold as much stock since ordinarily it would be readily available from local pithead and NCB stocks. At the end of the second week the DTI noted that the NCB were starting to hold back coal for schools 'although NUM would release' [it], because the limited supplies of this industrial grade coal 'must be husbanded for higher priorities.' The report gave an expectation of more school closures in all coalfield areas but noted that since schools do not constitute a priority 'some government statement to that effect may be necessary.'[40] The following DTI report referred to a press article over the weekend, which noted that schools in Yorkshire are 'continuing to provide school meals although otherwise closed' and that the NCB have not yet started refusing to supply schools where the NUM is permitting them but that this is imminent.[41] During the fourth week of the strike the police telex report from South Wales Constabulary noted that 'a number of schools in the area are closed through shortage of fuel.'[42]

With schools continuing to close the *Daily Mail* reported that Sir William Alexander, secretary of the Association of British Education Committees, had sought talks with the NUM to persuade them to allow supplies to schools. The NUM responded that it had not intended to prevent supplies to schools and that they were sure these could be arranged. The DTI report again noted that the NCB were having to refuse fuel to schools, which it did not consider a priority, though the NUM would allow it.[43] It would appear, from Alexander's request, that the Government's and NCB's refusal to consider schools a priority had not filtered through to the public, or indeed to the education establishment. It is clearly possible, or even likely, that both the Government and NCB desired that the NUM should take the blame in the eyes of the public for causing unnecessary distress. During the following week the Department of Education and Science (DES) reported that possibly three hundred schools out of about twenty-six thousand were closed in England affecting some one hundred and five thousand pupils (out of around eight million) i.e. a little over one per cent. In South Wales the figures were, respectively, two hundred and ninety out of one thousand one hundred schools, affecting fifty-eight thousand out of two hundred and ninety thousand pupils, i.e. twenty per cent or more. Early in week five a DTI report estimated

[40] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/9, 21 January 1972
[41] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January 1972
[42] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, South Wales, 31 January 1972
[43] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS18, 1 February 1972

that four hundred schools in England were closed though none were closed in Scotland, and a week later it estimated that over one thousand schools were closed in England and Wales. By the end of the strike, the DES reported that possibly one thousand solid fuel heated schools had been closed in England (with a total number of one thousand five hundred schools out of about thirty thousand). In Wales it was reported that five hundred and twenty-six schools were wholly closed and seventy-eight partly closed affecting around eighty-six thousand pupils.[44]

At the end of the first month of the strike, Gormley was quoted as saying that he was not too concerned about schools.[45] That same day, Rotherham rural district council wrote to West Riding county council (WRCC), with a copy to Ezra, enclosing a recent press article, which pointed out that some eighty-five schools had closed in the area due to a lack of coal and that there were a further fifteen threatened with closure. The letter alleged that education authorities from other parts of the country, including Kent and Essex, were receiving coal supplies from South Yorkshire, and the district council therefore asked why these stocks could not be made available to local schools. Seemingly, schools in non-mining areas were being given preference over those in mining areas causing the latter to close early. The letter also highlighted the adverse effects that the closure of schools was having on miners' children, some of whom were now eligible for free school meals and were consequently missing out on these. Ezra responded that the NCB were 'doing all possible to keep schools going', but noted that the Board was entirely dependent on open-cast production for priority supplies, and that schools were a lower priority.[46] The NUM and NCB held a joint meeting with the WRCC on 14 February to discuss the allegation, at which the latter denied it had deliberately withheld or diverted coal, 'but had to admit that their own appraisal (handed in) showed the effect complained of.' The NUM made it clear that it believed that Yorkshire should have priority over other counties. The report of the meeting also included reference to requests received by WRCC from schools that had closed to allow their pupils to attend schools which were still open for the purpose of sharing dining arrangements. The WRCC said that it had no

[44] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/21, 4 February; PRCS/25, 9 February; PRCS/27(28?), 15 February; PRCS/37, 26-28 February 1972
[45] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/24, 8 February 1972
[46] TNA: COAL78/1905, Letter, Rotherham Rural District Council to West Riding County Council (WRCC) & Ezra, 8 February, & Ezra's Reply, 14 February 1972

objection but that it would be at the discretion of the Heads of the receiving schools.[47] Cynthia Brailsford, a Kent miner's wife, speaking at the miners' rally in London the previous week, drew attention to the economic importance of school meals to those on low income, and the recent withdrawal of free school milk under the Education (Milk) Act 1971. She noted that her family's income had decreased following the NPLA, and had effectively been reduced further by price rises:

> Add to this the effects of other Tory Government policies. Two of my children have lost their school milk! – a free school dinner taken away! – and prices of the rest almost doubled. We are subject to vicious increases in rent, transport and electricity, and many other necessities of life. So you will appreciate miners' living standards have been devastated.[48]

## 7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, though the NCB felt itself to be well stocked and able to withstand a strike, it confronted an eventuality that it had not foreseen, a growing problem of coal transportation being curtailed, which trapped stocks where they were not needed. The success of the picketing in stranding coal stocks led to a rapid deterioration in the position of useable stocks and a steady downward revision of the length of time that these stocks would last. It became clear quite quickly that the strike would outlast the stocks and that there would be a consequent need for power cuts as power stations began to run short, though the Government appeared quite late in coming to this realisation. The chapter showed that the supply of coal to priority consumers remained a key issue throughout the dispute. All sides clearly believed it important to look after the vulnerable in society, but the issue also played a significant role in the manipulation of public opinion with accusations that the other side were the ones responsible for any failings. The question of what, or who, was to be considered a priority served to highlight the differing outlooks between the NUM leadership and the miners on the picket lines, and demonstrated their own respective priorities. Although the release of priority stocks varied from week to week and from locality to locality,

[47] TNA: COAL78/1905, Meeting, NUM, NCB &, WRCC, 14 February 1972
[48] Cited in Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) p.170

pickets generally did not want to release pit-head coal stocks for priority use, especially where there was a suspicion that stocks were being distributed to non-priority consumers, as some undoubtedly were. The evidence points to many miners considering schools to be a priority, and seemingly for several reasons: that when children were off school someone had to be at home to look after them; therefore children's mothers might be unable to work during the strike and so might lose wages or their jobs; that schools were a safe and warm environment; that children eligible for school meals would be unable to get them; and perhaps also that education was important. This in itself speaks to differing outlooks between the sectional interests of the NUM leadership, and indeed of the NCB and Government, and the wider concerns of the miners about the future.

# Chapter 8

# Support

## 8.1 Introduction

The support that the miners received during the strike was crucial to their ultimate success. The key area of such support came from the transport unions, which enabled the pickets to limit the movement of coal. The miners received additional support from power workers who were in their own dispute with the Government, allowing them to restrict the use of stocks already at the power stations, and from other trade unionists, students and members of the public, who refused to cross picket lines, provided information on the movement of coal, and gave food, accommodation and financial support. This chapter will assess the support that the miners received during the dispute, which began when the NUM at national and local level had appealed to other unions for assistance during the overtime ban prior to the start of the strike. It will begin by considering a statement made by the TUC in response to the NUM's appeal for assistance, in which it said that its members would not cross picket lines and that picket lines should therefore be placed where the NUM did not want coal to be moved. This statement has caused some controversy in being seen as both the cause of the effective mass trade union support for the strike, but also, conversely, as a weak response from the TUC in being the bare minimum that a trade union organisation might be expected to advocate. The chapter will consider the support that the miners received from the transport unions, in particular the railwaymen but also dockers and unionised lorry drivers, which was crucial in halting the movement of coal into the power stations. It will also address the support received from other trade unionists, except that given by the Birmingham engineers in the mass picket at Saltley coke depot, which is discussed in Chapter Nine. In most of these cases the support the

pickets received was achieved at local level, by the face-to-face interaction of fellow trade unionists, and very often went beyond that sought by the NUM leadership or the leadership of the other unions concerned. The chapter will consider the assistance and support that the miners received from students, who were also in their own dispute with the Government in respect of the financing and autonomy of student unions, which was part of a broader campaign against trade unions under the I.R.Act legislation. This support was widespread and innovative and injected a degree of exuberance that was ultimately quashed by the NEC, which felt it reflected badly on the miners' own dispute. The chapter will demonstrate that the miners received significant support from their wives and from members of the public. It will show that public opinion remained on the side of the miners throughout the strike, despite attempts by the Government to manipulate it and even as the strike began to have a detrimental effect on the public, including many workers being laid off.

## 8.2 TUC Statement

Daly wrote to all of the NUM's Area secretaries on 28 December 1971 noting that the National Union of Seamen (NUSn)[1], the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), ASLEF, the TGWU, and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) had all offered assistance to the miners in the forthcoming dispute.[2] On 6 January NUM leaders met with Feather, and formally requested 'that the TUC as a whole should formally support the NUM as the miners' opposition to the pay norm was in the interest of the whole Movement.'[3] Four days later the TUC's Finance and General Purposes Committee held a special meeting to hear the NUM's appeal, which expressed solidarity with the miners but decided that since the transport unions were already supporting them there was no need for official TUC instruction to do so. The TUC gave assurances that 'members would not pass picket lines' and therefore that 'it would be helpful if pickets were mounted by the NUM on those places from which they did not want coal to be moved'. The NUM subsequently announced publicly that they 'welcomed the TUC assurances that the Trade Unions would firmly instruct their

[1] NUSn used instead of NUS to distinguish the seamen from the students (NUSs)
[2] McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) p.202
[3] TUC Press statements 10 & 11 January 1972, cited in Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.218

members not to cross such picket lines in any circumstances.' This was an enhancement of the TUC's declared position but they did not contradict it.[4] Dorfman and Taylor observe that Feather and the TUC were doubtful whether the strike could have a successful outcome but were primarily anxious not to jeopardise the tripartite discussions on the economy, involving the TUC, the CBI and the Government, that were in their early stages, and which had begun in reaction to the fury aroused amongst trade-unionists by the I.R.Act.[5] The TUC and union leaders in general were wary of open challenges to government following the experiences across Europe in the aftermath of the revolt of 1968, and were primarily concerned with containing militancy and they therefore 'led' strikes only as a means of doing so.

There is some debate concerning the extent to which the TUC's statement gave a green light for miners' pickets to be placed so widely and effectively, or indeed whether it initiated the concept of flying pickets. In its review of the strike the Government saw the TUC instruction as crucial noting that the 'hint was taken up by the miners who quickly put pickets where they would be most effective.'[6] The DTI post-mortem notes considerable speculation in the press at the time about the strength of support from other unions for the NUM but that 'this TUC line proved to be the key factor in subsequent events.'[7] McCormick and Berkovitch both see the TUC recommendation as instrumental in the miners sending pickets throughout the country to all major power stations, ports, coal depots and steelworks.[8] Taylor claims that the TUC decision 'was of crucial importance' because whilst coal stocks were high they were badly distributed and therefore transport was a key issue, though, conversely, he sees the TUC as simply observing 'the sanctity of the picket line', which appears to give backing to the view that the TUC were doing, or asking, no more than would be expected of a conscientious trade unionist in these circumstances, i.e. not to cross a picket line.[9] Pitt holds this latter view and sees the TUC response as the very least it

[4] MRC: TUC, MSS.292D/24.1/5, FGPC, Special Meeting, 10 January 1972; Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) p.44

[5] Dorfman, G.A., *Government versus Trade Unionism in British Politics since 1968*, (London, 1979) pp.76-77; Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.58

[6] TNA: PREM15/986, Note (title redacted), 24 February; Allen to Armstrong, 25 February 1972

[7] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972

[8] McCormick, *Industrial Relations*, p.204; Berkovitch, I., *Coal on the Switchback: The Coal Industry since Nationalisation*, (London, 1977) p.168

[9] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, pp.218 & 233

could have done, noting that the 'national leadership of the British trade union movement had limited itself to calling on trade-unionists not to blackleg!'[10] A *New Statesman* editorial at the end of the first week made the same point: 'The TUC has banned blacklegging - it would be odd if it had not.[11] Reading University's student newspaper, *Shell*, described the TUC refusal to organise the 'blacking'[12] of the transportation of coal as a 'major blow' to the miners.[13]

The TUC statement made clear that the NUM had garnered the assistance of the transport unions prior to its appeal. Since these unions were the most important in terms of curtailing the movement of coal this suggests that the TUC recommendation did not initiate the mobile picketing action though it may have given encouragement to the miners' leadership, and to other trade unionists, that they had some national backing. The NUM's 1972 conference report subsequently noted that, following the TUC's assurances, 'pickets were dispersed throughout the country'.[14] The TUC's statement raises the issue concerning the level of support the miners had within the trade union movement, both prior to the strike and as it developed. The archives show the Government holding contradictory opinions on this question. At the end of the first week of the strike a DTI report appears to minimise the TUC's role noting that: 'The TUC and individual unions have also in the main only reacted, doing no more than open the way for NUM to seek support at local level.'[15] On 27 January, whilst noting that the TUC general council was appealing to members for help to fund the pickets' expenses and to publicise their case, the DTI noted that the TUC 'continues to ignore the miners' appeal for concerted trade union support.'[16] At the end of the fourth week the DTI claimed that: 'The NUM are receiving no more than moderate and grudging support from other unions'[17] However, in the immediate aftermath of the strike, the Cabinet minutes claimed that: 'The main reason for the pickets' success, however, lay in the instructions which other unions had given that their members should not cross picket lines.'[18]

[10] Pitt, M., *The World On Our Backs: The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike*, (London, 1979) p.123
[11] *New Statesman*, Vol.83, No.2130, 14 January 1972, p.34
[12] Refusing to handle
[13] Reading University Library (RU): *Shell*, Editorial, 21 January 1972
[14] KL: KA25/U/Z5, NUM Conference 1972, NEC Report, p.7
[15] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/4, 15-16 January 1972
[16] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[17] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/22, 5-6 February 1972
[18] TNA: CAB128/50/8, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 7, 17 February 1972

## 8.3 Transport Unions' Support

During the overtime ban, and in the run up to the strike, the NUM at national and liaison committee level had begun to make contacts with trade unions and individual trade unionists for assistance. Pitt refers to the differing methods employed by NUM leaders and by the pickets in their approaches. In a letter to Daly on 23 December Kent miners' leader Jack Dunn noted the difficulties that he was having in garnering assistance from other unions because the letters he had sent to district and regional officers of various unions in the area had met with a cool response in that that they had stated that they were unable to support the miners until they had authority to do so from their headquarters. Pitt notes that this inertia at official level put the onus onto the pickets themselves to make these initial contacts with other trade unionists for support. During the overtime ban and throughout the seven weeks of the strike NUM members put the miners' case at hundreds of meetings of trade union branches, trades councils, student unions, socialist groups, working men's clubs, tenants' associations and the like, and also to mass open air meetings at building sites, factory gates and docksides. Docks were subsequently picketed to prevent the import of coal and to restrict the movement of fuel previously unloaded, and as early as November 1971 the Dover branch of the NUSn pledged support to the NUM and asked their NEC to do likewise.[19] Within a few days of the strike beginning, dockers in Swansea and Cardiff refused to unload coal,[20] and Welsh pickets travelled as far as the tip of Cornwall to stop coal ships unloading at various small harbours, receiving an 'excellent response' wherever they went.[21] DTI reports during the first week noted the blacking of coal cargoes in South Wales and at other ports during the week, and that the NUM had enlisted support from other unions at local level and were having some success at preventing imports and movement of supplies.[22] By the beginning of the third week the DTI noted that Swansea, Newport and Cardiff dockers were blacking imports, and the Government reasoned, correctly, that the blacking of imports and of fuel stocks by secondary unions had the benefit of freeing the miners from picketing those depots and so released them to go to other sites.[23]

[19] Pitt, M., *The World on Our Backs*, pp.119-20 & 167
[20] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.12
[21] LB: MS4000/2/152, SaltleyI, p.2, John Podmore, Maerdy Colliery, South Wales
[22] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January; PRCS/4, 15-16 January 1972
[23] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January; PRCS/14, 27 January 1972

The key support received by the miners in halting fuel movement came from the rail unions. On 6 January NUR officials instructed their members not to transport oil into power stations if these were to switch from coal to oil, and as the strike began ASLEF instructed its members not to carry 'coal and other fuel which could have a bearing on the dispute'.[24] The Government noted at the beginning of week two that the rail unions in Scotland would not allow more than normal supplies of oil into the two major oil-burning power stations, which depended on supplies by rail; these would not therefore be able to achieve maximum output to allow reductions in output from coal burning stations in the area.[25] At the end of that week the DTI reported that railwaymen in Edinburgh had refused to unload either domestic coal or coal for a paper manufacturer,[26] and a week later reported that most of the remaining rail wagons still in transit were held up at marshalling yards due to rail union blacking, with the odd wagon occasionally released to meet priority commitments.[27] At the same time railwaymen in north London were said to have agreed to stop coal and oil deliveries to local power stations though the blacking action was undertaken by individual groups of trade-unionists outside of the control of their own officials. This is acknowledged by the DTI, which noted initially that: 'In North London the NUR are said to have agreed to stop coal and oil deliveries to power stations.'[28] Two days later it revised this in noting that: 'The NUR said yesterday that the decision of its North London District Council to ask members not to move any more coal... had no authority.'[29] The DTI further acknowledged that there was no general support for the miners from ETU [sic],[30] NUR or TGWU though individual members had responded to the pickets.[31]

The NUM held an inter-union meeting in Scotland on 3 February with representatives from NUR, ASLEF, NUSn, and also power workers, to make arrangements for preventing supplies of oil reaching Cockenzie and Longannet power stations, and if this were successful then it was thought unlikely that they

[24] Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.43
[25] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 1st Meeting, 17 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/5, 17 January 1972
[26] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/8, 20 January; PRCS/9, 21 January 1972
[27] TNA: COAL31/300, NCB Marketing Report, 28 January 1972
[28] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/12, 25 January 1972
[29] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[30] Electrical Trades Union, became EETPU (Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union) in 1968
[31] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/10, 22-23 January 1972

would proceed with picketing Grangemouth oil refinery, Falkirk.[32] A few days later the DTI reported that ASLEF railwaymen and TGWU tanker drivers in Scotland were supporting this 'concordat' and refusing to deliver oil from the Grangemouth to any SSEB power stations, and that similar action was being undertaken by drivers and railwaymen in England and Wales such that no oil deliveries are now going by road to three quarters of coal-fired CEGB stations. There was also a threat of sympathetic action against supplies to oil-fired power stations from the Fawley refinery, Southampton and Shellhaven refinery, Essex.[33] The following week the DTI reported that no oil trains were moving in Scotland and that picketing was continuing to block rail despatches from Shellhaven and Coryton refineries (Essex) with additional rail movement from Stanlow refinery (Cheshire) to points normally supplied from Shellhaven blocked by ASLEF. Following discussions with ASLEF and TGWU there then began to be some relaxation at Thames-side refineries at the end of the sixth week and agreement was reached to lift restrictions on rail despatches from Shellhaven, except to power stations.[34]

The DTI noted, with regard to the halting of oil and coal supplies to CEGB and SSEB power stations, that 'in all cases the decision to support the miners has been taken by mass meetings of individual unionists and not at the formal instigation of their unions, hence... there is only a fragmented target for any legal action under the Trade Disputes Act 1967', or, after 28 February 1972, the Industrial Relations Act[35] (see Chapter Ten for further discussion on the legislation). The Government were similarly concerned about the actions of unionised lorry drivers. On 6 February Jack Jones, TGWU general secretary, addressed a miners' rally and condemned the one hundred thousand non-unionised lorry drivers who were strike-breaking, whilst praising the TGWU drivers who were in solidarity with the miners, though making it clear 'that sympathetic action is a matter for individual TGWU members'. This can be interpreted either as Jones failing to openly back the miners with full TGWU directed support, and therefore putting responsibility onto the membership, or, as the Government saw it, that by 'avoiding from the start any central guidance, he has effectively fragmented the

[32] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/19, 2 February 1972
[33] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/23, 7 February 1972
[34] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/29, 16 February; PRCS/30, 17 February; PRCS/31, 18 February 1972
[35] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/23, 7 February 1972

target for any legal action' under the 1967 Act; any legal action would therefore have to be pursued against individuals rather than against the union leadership,[36] and was perhaps a deliberate means for the unions concerned to avoid blame.

## 8.4 Militancy and Restraint

The evidence generally acknowledges a difference in outlook between the NUM leadership and the pickets regarding the extent of picketing. It is unclear whether this was because the leadership wanted to avoid legal action, as the Government believed, or whether their role as intermediary between employers and members behoved them to have a more restrained and conservative approach. The pickets were often prepared to go further than the leadership desired, or to act in defiance of its recommendations, and this was exacerbated by the fact that decision-making took place at local level: the DTI reports refer to the situation in Newcastle where the 'NUM area secretary appears to have lost confidence of members and all negotiations [are] on an ad hoc basis';[37] Morgan observed that the leadership were 'not initiating the course of the strike but responding to a mood of militancy and determination';[38] and Dai Francis, South Wales NUM general secretary, pointed to the decision making coming from below, noting, 'This struggle was won by the rank and file, I would say that anywhere without hesitation, without reservation, it was the swell from below, the unity within the ranks.'[39] Members of the Swansea Steam strike committee made similar points about the divergence between leadership and membership, noting that: 'The support you had from their rank and file very often went a lot further than what their national leadership directed them to do.' They also noted the lack of support from union leaders such as Graham Saunders (secretary of the TUC advisory committee), who considered crossing the picket line at Pontardulais during the strike: '... the question was put to the fellow you know, "Well are you going to cross our picket line?" And his answer was "Well it depends how many people are picketing."'[40]

[36] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/22, 5-6 February 1972
[37] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/20, 3 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/27, 11-14 February 1972
[38] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.32
[39] LB: LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.10, Interview, Dai Francis
[40] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.13. Swansea Steam

A key area of support received by the miners during the dispute came from the power-workers, who were involved in their own wage negotiations. They agreed to black any supplies which crossed the picket line and began to advise the miners on stock levels and deliveries, and on where to place their pickets in order to be most effective.[41] On 14 January, at the end of the first week, the four unions associated with electricity supply workers - TGWU, AUEW, NUGMW (National Union of General and Municipal Workers), and EETPU (Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union) - gave notice of an overtime ban from 1 February, if their own pay claim was not met.[42] *The Times* noted that 'their sudden militancy could not have come at a more embarrassing time for the Government',[43] and the Cabinet hoped, rather optimistically, that a successful outcome in these negotiations would tend to further isolate the miners.[44] In defiance of their official leadership power workers in London formed an unofficial combine, which met on 19 January and agreed to work towards local liaison committees involving power-workers, gas-workers and miners. The following day, an unofficial demonstration by London power-workers outside the Electricity Council's offices in Millbank was joined by Kent miners with banners declaring 'Power and Mineworkers Unite'.[45]

During the wage negotiations the TGWU urged the power unions to continue their overtime ban as an act of solidarity with the miners, but Frank Chapple, EETPU general secretary and right wing member of the TUC general council, refused this request arguing that to bring down the Government by industrial action would be counter-productive and would lead to a Conservative victory by a landslide majority. He therefore used his casting vote to accept the wage offer of just under eight percent.[46] After this wage settlement was agreed, power workers at Battersea power station spoke with the miners on the picket line and told them that 'they felt the miners had been sold out by it as much as they had themselves.'[47] The interaction between miners and power workers during the strike shows a strong solidarity for one another's struggles, and also demonstrates a similar disconnect between the outlook of the respective union leadership and

[41] Taylor, *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, p.222
[42] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 1st Meeting, 17 January 1972
[43] *The Times*, 15 January 1972
[44] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 2nd Meeting, 26 January 1972
[45] Pitt, *The World on Our Backs*, p.152
[46] *The Times*, 9 February; TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/23, 7 February 1972
[47] LSE: *Beaver*, No.116, 17 February 1972, p.1

of the rank-and-file. The fact that the Government was ultimate employer in both instances acted to further unify the struggle between them.

## 8.5 Students' Support

Student numbers at universities, polytechnics and further education colleges in the UK doubled during the 1960s, which led to an influx of students from a wider variety of backgrounds and broadened the class background of the student body.[48] Globally, students in this period were associated with political radicalisation and with protest against injustice, including against government, which came to a head in 1968. Students at universities such as Essex, LSE and Oxford had participated in this action. Memories of these events was still relatively fresh in the collective mind, and students from these and other universities and colleges around the country supported the pickets. The role played by students during the strike was widely praised by miners. The Ministerial Committee on Emergencies noted, within the first few weeks of the strike, that picketing had been more effective than anticipated due in part to student participation.[49] Students were involved in their own dispute with the Government over its intention to change the rules relating to the financing of student unions and to impose a Registrar of student unions akin to that proposed in the legislation to restrict trade union activity under the I.R.Act.[50] The National Union of Students (NUSs) was also making overtures to the TUC at this time, with a view to affiliation.[51] This, along with the echoes of 1968, fed into a view amongst students that the miners' dispute was something that they should support. Some student newspapers also, in their calls to support the miners, drew attention, with embarrassment, to the role that students had played during the general strike and lockout in 1926 when they had been used by the government to assist with strikebreaking. This also raised the issue of how the students' own struggle related to the miners, or to workers' struggles more broadly, which was part of a pre-existing debate within left political circles.[52] Joe Holmes, president of Kent NUM, made reference to the

[48] Davies, A.J., *To Build A New Jerusalem: The British Labour Party from Keir Hardie to Tony Blair*, (London, 1996) p.321
[49] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 2nd Meeting, 26 January 1972
[50] MRC: NUSs Archive, MSS.280/78, Main Mail, 1/19, 1972, Memo to DoE on Consultative Document, December 1971
[51] MRC, NUSs: MSS.280/90/4, NUS Easter Conference 1972, CD14, Union Autonomy Campaign report
[52] RU: *Shell*, Editorial, No.325, 21 January; LSE: *Beaver*, No.115, 3 February 1972

difference between the student reaction to the 1972 strike and its role in 1926 when he addressed the NUSs extraordinary conference on 30 January.[53] *Time Out* also drew attention to the students' attempts to link their own struggle against the Government to the miners' dispute in its reporting on a thirty thousand strong student rally in Trafalgar Square on 23 January where in parts of the march 'placards reading "Victory to the Miners" were more numerous than "Hands off student unions", and the main slogan was "Student Struggle, Miners' fight, one struggle, one right".'[54]

In addition to students joining picket lines, collecting money and providing food and accommodation, they also helped keep checks on coal movements and provided a platform for miners at colleges and universities. Students at Aston Polytechnic used their initiative to create and distribute leaflets outlining the legal rights of pickets and offered legal advice in the case of miners who were arrested.[55] The involvement of students was first mentioned in the DTI records on 20 January when large numbers of LSE and Essex University students joined, or effectively took over from, orderly NUM pickets at Dagenham and at Colchester-Rowhedge docks respectively, creating violent disturbances and halting the unloading of household briquettes from Holland. Colchester dockers were reportedly willing to handle the cargo but dockers at Dagenham refused to handle any further shipments though they had already unloaded half the cargo before the students arrived. The quantities involved were said to have been marginal but the DTI was concerned that such student activity could be part of a coordinated plan which might be extended to more vital targets.[56] Essex students also provided lodging for pickets on university premises until the NUM leadership announced that it did not approve. Most of the men subsequently left the campus, though some reportedly took some convincing and one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty stayed on for some time. Essex students also assisted in the effective picketing of a domestic oil depot at Ipswich docks and *Time Out* reported the collaboration between students and miners in planning and executing the picketing, noting that the degree of solidarity between students and strikers 'totally amazed everyone concerned.'[57]

[53] MRC, NUSs: MSS.280/87/13, NUS Extraordinary Conference Report, 29 January 1972
[54] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[55] LB: MS4000/2/152, 'The Miners' Strike', Morgan, pp.16-7
[56] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/8, 20 January 1972
[57] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/9, 21 January; PRCS/12, 25 January; PRCS/14, 27 January 1972

LSE students were said to have picketed 'continuously' at Battersea power station and raised money for the miners in various ways. LSE students' union undertook to 'adopt' a branch of the NUM for the duration of the strike to give practical help to the NUM and encouraged other universities to do the same.[58] Students from Reading University and University College Oxford also supported pickets at both Didcot and Battersea power stations.[59] Reading students subsequently established a strike committee and began to attend the picket at Earley power station. They also accommodated pickets at the university and planned to donate £150 to the miners' strike fund but, after objections that this amounted to an *ultra vires* payment, gave food and full communication facilities instead.[60] Students at the University of East Anglia also accommodated pickets on campus,[61] and the miners received additional sympathetic support from students at York, Canterbury and Oxford.[62] Students in York also proposed making a financial contribution to the miners disguised as a lecturer's fee.[63] In Scotland students assisted in picketing three power stations and one of those charged with 'mobbing and rioting' at Longannet power station (discussed in Chapter Five) was a Glasgow student.[64]

The NUSs dispatched a weekly mailout to all student unions, known as Main Mail, and this shows considerable support for the miners from the NUSs executive. The Main Mail dispatched after the NUSs extraordinary conference on 29 and 30 January noted a resolution supporting the miners and an instruction for a donation of £1,000 from the NUSs to the miners' strike fund, and it also sought contributions from associate student unions. The following week's Main Mail enclosed two leaflets produced by Kent NUM for distribution, and also a joint statement by the NUSs and NUM, which made a direct connection between their respective struggles with the Government and stated that students' support for the miners was fundamental to their own fight for the autonomy of student unions. The statement outlined concrete ways in which students could support the miners: it noted that the NUM were happy to provide speakers at student unions; it called on students to help on the picket lines and with the provision of accommodation

[58] LSE: *Beaver*, Nos.116, 17 February, p.1 & 117, 6 March 1972, p.8
[59] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/11, 24 January, PRCS/12, 25 January & PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[60] RU: *Shell*, No.326, 12 February 1972
[61] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[62] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/10, 22-23 January 1972
[63] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/9, 21 January, PRCS/14, 27 January 1972
[64] MRC: MSS.280/90/4, NUS Easter Conference 1972, Interim Executive report

for pickets, and provided a list of contact details for NUM Area secretaries to this end; and it called upon students to attend the miners' demonstration in London on 6 February, where the NUM were allowing the NUSs to participate as an integral part of the march, with the NUSs' hoping that this would demonstrate to trade unionists that students were not indifferent to workers' struggles.[65]

Support for the miners was not, however, universal amongst students and the agenda for the NUSs conference in April 1972 gave a flavour of the range of views within the student body. Bradford University students' union initially submitted a resolution applauding the support given by students to the miners but rejecting attempts to subordinate the interests of the NUSs to a political campaign.[66] This provoked a number of proposed amendments by other universities. Thames Polytechnic wanted to delete everything after the applause for the miners, and insert praise for those who made financial contributions whilst condemning the NUSs Executive for not having done so. Birmingham University proposed replacing the resolution with one that saw the miners' claim as just, but argued that student attempts to make political points for their own ends would only hinder the miners' struggle. Reading University sought to replace the resolution with one that congratulated the miners on their victory and recognised it as a victory of the entire working class over the Government and a timely reminder of the students' own autonomy campaign. Royal Holloway College simply wanted recognition as the only student union to have contributed to the NUSs miners' campaign fund. A message of thanks from Daly was read out at the NUSs April conference, which stated: 'Next to the labour movement the support we received from NUS, from student unions and from students generally was the most valuable we received during our recent strike. For this, we are more than grateful. We could not have won without this support.'[67] Scargill observed that the miners showed the students 'a degree of discipline and organisation' which they may have read about but had not previously witnessed.[68]

At the end of January, the NEC announced that students were no longer welcome on picket lines and noted that students were reportedly 'more enthusiastic than

[65] MRC: MSS.280/78/3-4, NUS Main Mail 1972
[66] MRC: MSS.280/90/4, NUS Easter Conference 1972, Agenda, February 1972
[67] MRC: MSS.280/87/14, NUS Easter Conference Report, 10-14 April 1972, p.19
[68] Scargill, A., 'The New Unionism', Interview, *New Left Review*, Vol.1, No.92, Jul-Aug 1975, p.12

accurate'.[69] NUM representatives speaking to Reading students subsequently were keen to point out that there was not a conscious anti-student policy but that nevertheless the dispute should be, and be seen to be, a working-class struggle.[70] These points reflect concern amongst miners, and the NEC in particular, at the exuberance and indiscipline of students and how this reflected on the miners' case. Post-graduate student Peter Tinsley was philosophical about this relationship noting that:

> The miners were the big problem as far as the police were concerned but the students always make a good headline. You know: student agitators running amok in working class struggles without having anything to do with it. [They] printed home addresses of students and they all came from places like Suffolk and Surrey and it didn't look good and the miners resented it I think.[71]

## 8.6 Women in the Strike

The role of women in the strike is under-represented both in the literature and in the sources. This is not to say that women were not present, but that their role is not well reflected. This is in part due to the dominance of men within the industry and within the politics of the time; there were no women on the NEC of the NUM, no women on the NCB, and just one woman in the Cabinet, Margaret Thatcher. In terms of employees, there were just eleven female industrial employees on the NCB's books in 1971, compared to over two hundred and seventy-eight thousand men; they all undertook surface work and were aged between 40 and 60, but were known colloquially as 'pit lasses'.[72] As we saw in chapter six, the vast majority of female employees in the coal industry were clerical workers employed in the collieries and depots, and in regional and Area NCB offices. Approximately seventy percent of all clerks nationally were female, and, in the coal industry, they were represented in the COSA and CAWU unions. The majority of the twelve thousand five hundred members of the NUM affiliated COSA joined the strike, whereas the majority of the five thousand five hundred CAWU members in the industry stayed in work. Some COSA members joined picket lines and

[69] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS18, 1 February 1972
[70] RU: *Shell*, No.326, 12 February 1972
[71] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Peter Tinsley, post-graduate student, University of Birmingham
[72] TNA: COAL44/26, Wage-Earners Statistics, 1971

picketed against other clerks, both unionised and non-unionised who remained in work. Clerical workers, and women, were therefore to be found on both sides of the picket lines during the strike.[73]

The key area of involvement of women in the strike was that of the miners' wives, and though some had initially been reluctant for their husbands to go on strike, this soon changed. A member of the Ammanford and Gwendraeth strike committee tasked with recruiting pickets noted that, in the first few days of the strike, the response he received from some of the wives had been: 'What the hell was he doing on strike, they couldn't afford to be on strike', but by the end of the first week the response at the same houses had become: 'You mind you don't go back to work until you've won the day'.[74] There were nothing like as many women's groups active in the 1972 strike as in the 1984-85 strike, though they did exist on a much smaller scale. Jean McCrindle recalls meeting miners' wives' groups in Kent during the strike, and Marsha, secretary of the Barnsley miners' wives' group in the 1984-85 strike, believed that, in the earlier strikes such as 1972, women only got involved at a local level at their pit, which might have involved shouting at scabs,[75] or knocking on their doors late at night. A key difference in the later strike, she believed, was that most women by then had telephones and a lot of them had cars, and could therefore organise a picket in another area relatively simply.[76] In the 1972 strike, wives and daughters often attended the quieter picket lines, which were the majority, and became involved in other forms of support.[77] For example, wives and families attended a picket and sit-down protest on 17 January at the NCB's national computer centre in Cannock, Staffordshire to prevent access for clerical employees.[78] Also in Staffordshire, miners' wives at Rugeley left twenty children at the DSS office to be fed and cared for, in a protest at the level of benefits.[79] The following week in Nottinghamshire, a three-day picket at the NCB Area headquarters at

[73] TNA: COAL/31/416, NCB Situation reports, 3, 4, 8-10 February; COAL31/383, NCB Situation reports, 11 - 18 February; HO325/101, Telexes, South Wales and Durham, 14 February; FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, Annex S, June 1972
[74] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.7, Ammanford & Gwendraeth
[75] Strikebreakers
[76] Rowbotham, S. & McCrindle, J., 'More Than Just a Memory: Some Political Implications of Women's Involvement in the Miners' Strike, 1984-85', *Feminist Review*, No.23, Summer 1986, p.116-8
[77] Douglass, D.J., *Strike, Not the End of the Story: Reflections on the Major Coal Mining Strikes in Britain*, (Overton, 2005) p.19
[78] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Staffordshire & Stoke City, 17 January 1972
[79] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/26, 10 February 1972

Edwinstowe saw miners' wives throw flour at clerical workers in protest at their crossing the picket line.[80] This echoed similar action during the 1926 general strike when women in Glasgow threw flour at strike-breaking transport workers, which Hughes understands as representing a more informal, and spontaneous form of industrial militancy for those excluded from institutional forms of protest.[81]

Women also became involved with appeals to the Government. On 18 January a contingent of miners' wives from Kent and Derbyshire attended the first Commons debate on the strike,[82] and the following day one hundred and thirty miners and their wives lobbied MPs at Parliament. Some of the wives then visited both 10 Downing Street, where they presented a petition, and the offices of the NCB, where a small deputation was seen by officials.[83] On 27 January twenty thousand miners and their families marched through Cardiff to a rally in Sophia Gardens,[84] and many miners' wives and families also attended the rally at Hyde Park on 6 February. Tina Dogherty, from Warwickshire, explained that it was the women who had wanted to go to London to help make up the rally and to show 'the Government that the miners' wives were at the back of them… that it wasn'a just miners but wives as well.' She noted that a good few women were there on their own, and that not all pits had laid on buses for women or envisaged that they would want to take part.[85] Nine hundred miners and their wives arrived by special train from Kent for the rally, accompanied by the Deal Girls Pipers, who led them on the march to Hyde Park. Cynthia Brailsford addressed the crowd, and a letter from the mother of Fred Matthews (the picket killed just three days previously) was read out, and in which she said: 'It is vital that you fight to keep the trade union movement free against the most vicious Tory Government of this century.'[86]

As we saw above, there was significant support from students during the strike, and whilst is not clear how these broke down from a gender perspective, it must be assumed that a significant number were female. In addition to student support

[80] TNA: COAL31/300, Note, NCB to Board Members, 17 February; HO325/101, Telex, Nottinghamshire, 24 January 1972
[81] Hughes, A., *Gender and Political Identities in Scotland, 1919-1939*, (Edinburgh, 2010) p.99
[82] Cited in Pitt, *The World on Our Backs,* p.171
[83] TNA: HO325/101, Telex, Metropolitan Police, 23 January 1972
[84] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix I, p.3
[85] LB: LB: MS4000/2/152/3, Actuality, Tina Dogherty
[86] Cited in Pitt, *The World on Our Backs,* pp.169-70

on the picket lines and in providing food and accommodation, LSE students also raised money for a 'kids' outing' for the children of the Kent miners, whom students had met on the picket lines at Battersea power station.[87] The final area of support given by women during the strike was during the confrontation at Saltley, which is discussed further in the following chapter. In addition to support from local political activists in providing accommodation, the key numerical support came from female engineering workers from Birmingham. Shop steward at SU Carburettors, Sylvia Sabin, recalled that many women joined the march: 'Married women my age, young women, women who really hadn't got the time to do this, but because their sympathies were so strong with the miners they went down there on this march. We did literally march from the SU down to Saltley.'[88] Arthur Harper, president of the Birmingham East District AUEW, recalled the role played by the women on the march:

> Well, the women at SU Carburettor, well, they always are good, they're marvelous, on any issue, on any demonstration, they are good, and their spirit was terrific on this march, they really went to town and they sailed into the police and they cajoled them, and well, made fun of 'em if you like.[89]

Clearly there was broad support from women for the miners on strike, in particular from their own communities, but also from other trade unionists. This reflected the broad support the miners received across the country and throughout the working class and general public.

## 8.7 Public Support

The miners received wide support from the public with donations of food and financial support towards the strike fund, and with offers of accommodation for pickets. There were reports of two ten-year old boys from Reading who donated their pocket money, and of pensioners contributing money out of gratitude to the NUM who were ensuring they still had coal delivered to them.[90] Members of the

[87] LSE: *Beaver*, Nos.116, 17 February, p.1 & 117, 6 March 1972, p.8
[88] LB:MS 4000/2/152, SaltleyI, p.8; SaltleyII, p.19, Sylvia Sabin, Senior shop steward, SU Carburettors, Birmingham
[89] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper, president of East District AUEW, Birmingham
[90] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.16; Douglass, *Strike, Not the End of the Story*, p.19

public accommodated pickets and gave assistance on picket lines and on 21 January the NUM issued a statement giving instructions to pickets on how to deal with the casual help being offered by the public regarding attendance on picket lines, noting that: 'This help should be accepted but there must be at least one NUM member in charge of the line at all times.'[91] South Wales NUM reported that it received a deluge of supportive letters daily and from as far afield as Australia and the United States, which contrasted with no more than a dozen letters and phone calls opposing the strike.[92] There was, however, some other opposition too, with Gormley, whilst speaking at a rally in Newcastle, claiming that there had been two bomb threats against the NUM headquarters in London.[93] The Government records reveal that it had evidence of other opposition from the public with a scientist, Dr. Davison, who wrote to the Scottish Home and Health Department and offered to drive supplies into power stations himself under police protection and for his firm to purchase hydrogen (in modest quantities) without its ultimate destination being guessed, if it were of help.[94]

For its part the Government were primarily concerned at the level of public support for the miners that was maintained throughout the strike, and it was frustrated at anything that fed into this. At the end of the second week the DTI aired its frustration at the coincidental showing on television of two items: a documentary concerning the breaking of a clay-miners' strike in Cornwall in 1913 by police brought in from outside the area, which, it believed, may have coloured the public's view on the role of the police; and a *Review* programme about elderly 'Sunday painter' miners, which was interspersed with pictures of miners crouched in narrow seams with pickaxes - presumably to illustrate the way in which mining had been undertaken when these men were working. The DTI's concern here was the belief that this footage served to counter the impression of the modern, technologically sophisticated coal industry that should have been produced from the press coverage of the safety problems underground caused by pickets refusal to undertake this work.[95] Public support stayed with the miners even after 1.2 million people were laid off due to the power cuts, with the

[91] Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*, (London, 2009) p.65
[92] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.16, & Appendix II, p.10, Dai Francis
[93] TNA: PREM15/985, Teleprinter message, No.10 to Chequers, 12 February 1972
[94] TNA: POWE14/2664, Letter, Dr. Davison to Scottish Home & Health Department, 2 February 1972
[95] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/10, 22-23 January 1972

Department of Employment noting that: 'So far there seems little evidence of any new disposition to put the blame on the miners.'[96]

Public sympathy and support are essential in any major dispute, and the 1972 miners' strike was no exception with all parties, though perhaps more so the Government, aware of the need to have the public 'on-side'. The Cabinet recognised on the third day of the strike that the miners commanded considerable public sympathy.[97] A week later the NCB noted that: 'The Union are winning a lot of public sympathy… There is a deep-seated, genuine support for the miners that has its roots in history. We are not going to be able to change that - even if we wanted to.'[98] Public opinion was in fact on the side of the miners from the very beginning of the strike and even after the strike began to have serious effects on the public this did not diminish and rather the blame was placed on those who were refusing to give the miners their wage claim.[99] Opinion polls undertaken by Gallup and by the Opinion Research Centre (ORC) all found that public opinion was with the miners. Gallup undertook polls in January, February and March 1972 asking the public with whom their sympathies mainly lay, employers or miners. The results were: in January - employers sixteen percent, miners fifty-five percent; in February - employers nineteen percent, miners fifty-seven percent; and in March - employers twenty percent, miners fifty-two percent. Thus, whilst some sympathy moved towards the employers, support for the miners stayed strong throughout the strike and its aftermath at more than half those surveyed, whilst the support for the Government was just one fifth or lower. After the strike Gallup asked whether the public approved or disapproved of the miners' methods and found that thirty percent approved whilst fifty-nine percent disapproved.[100]

Conservative Central Office commissioned its own research with two surveys undertaken by ORC on 1 and 14 February. Both surveys asked if coalminers were or were not justified in striking for a larger pay rise, with those agreeing that they were justified rising from fifty-four percent to sixty-six percent, whilst those disagreeing dropping from thirty-two percent to twenty-six percent. When asked

[96] TNA: PREM15/985, Letter, Holland to Gregson, 15 February 1972
[97] TNA: CAB/128/50/2, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 11 January 1972
[98] TNA: COAL31/383, Note, Kirk to NCB Chairman, 18 January 1972
[99] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.35
[100] Cited in Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.59

if they believed it to be justified even if this might mean price rises, those agreeing rose from forty-two percent to sixty percent, whilst those disagreeing dropped from forty-one percent to twenty-seven percent. The surveys also asked whether they considered that the Government was handling the dispute well or badly, with those believing it was doing very well or fairly well dropping from twenty-six percent to nineteen percent and those believing it was doing fairly badly or very badly rising from fifty-seven percent to sixty-eight percent. The ORC surveys concurred with the Gallup polls in finding a higher disapproval than approval rating for how the NUM were behaving during the dispute, though the divergence between these positions closed over the fortnight; those approving of the NUM methods rose from seventeen percent to twenty-nine percent, whilst those disapproving dropped from seventy-one percent to sixty-one percent.[101] Clearly then, public support for the miners, and for their wage claim, remained strong despite disapproval of the methods that were employed. A key finding of the ORC snap polls, for the Conservative Research Department, was that a majority of those polled (56%) believed that the Government were right to stop wage demands in excess of ten percent. They took this to imply that much of the support for the miners was based on ignorance of their pay demand, and that the miners' case would be severely weakened if the public were aware that the demand was for over thirty percent.[102]

From the outset, all sides engaged in attempts to win and manipulate public opinion. On the eve of the strike the NCB circulated an advert in the industry press entitled 'Message to all Mineworkers', which explained that the NEC had rejected two proposals by the NCB, either of which would have averted the strike, and it claimed that the NUM had also rejected arbitration.[103] This was designed to circumnavigate the NUM leadership and appeal directly to miners in order to sow discontent between the membership and the leadership, and so undermine the unity of the strike. However, this failed to take account of the fact that the leadership were tasked with negotiating on behalf of the miners and therefore the NCB's actions could not have stopped the strike, it also appeared to proceed from the assumption that the leadership were the militant element, and that the members were more restrained. On 14 January, at the end of the first week, the

[101] TNA: LAB78/84, Opinion Research Centre, Snap Surveys, 1 & 14 February 1972
[102] CPA: CRD3/42/16, Covering letter to second poll, Spencer (ORC) to Douglas (Conservative Central Office), 15 February 1972
[103] TNA: COAL31/383, 'Message to all Mineworkers', 7-8 January 1972

NCB public relations department sent out 'factual information' notes to all MPs, which it felt might be helpful in the forthcoming Parliamentary debate on the coal industry. These gave: a summary of the wage negotiations up to the beginning of the strike; an NCB press office report entitled 'Arbitrate, not Fight' concerning a speech by Ezra on 13 January urging the NUM to settle the dispute peacefully through negotiation; an opinion from an Industrial Relations academic at LSE concerning the historic referral of wages disputes to the NRT, a position which was altered in 1961 at the request of the NUM to allow either side to decline to undertake this. Most bizarrely, the 'factual information' also included an NCB press office note concerning the forced retirement of the remaining fifty-seven pit ponies from North Yorkshire, which, it alleged, followed directly from 'the refusal of local NUM branches to allow horse-keepers to go down the pits to care for the ponies.'[104] The latter press release was clearly intended to appeal to public sentiment, and to tap into the Great British public's concern for animals. At the end of the second week, the DTI reports reflected the Government's sense of frustration at press coverage of the dispute appearing to favour the miners, noting that pickets were widespread and generally peaceful 'but with occasional local incidents, nearly all of which seems to be reported in the Press,' and that 'considerable ingenuity seems to be exercised in identifying targets and synchronising action with arrival of press, radio and TV reporters and cameramen.'[105] A week later the Government's frustration was palpable:

> Pickets which are unsuccessful are for obvious reasons not reported by the strikers while those which are circumvented and the important centres not yet harassed obviously cannot be mentioned without risk of attack. The impression given by the press reports is therefore of an unimpeded accumulation of victories by the militants.[106]

In interview after the strike, the Ammanford and Gwendraeth strike committee noted how, as the strike progressed, the media swung towards the miners' cause: 'I would say that the longer it went on it was obvious we were going to be winners, and then the press and TV wanted to be on our side.'[107]

As power cuts appeared likely in early February, TGWU shop stewards in Scotland threatened to break their solidarity position with the miners and send oil

[104] TNA: COAL78/1906, NCB Public Relations Dept, Notes for MPs, 14 January 1972
[105] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/8, 20 January; PRCS/10, 22-23 January 1972
[106] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/16, 29-30 January 1972
[107] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.7, Ammanford & Gwendraeth

tanker drivers in to Kilmarnock power station because they were concerned at the hardship that power cuts would cause to elderly people. The threat reportedly had the effect of pickets being withdrawn from Ravenscraig steel works.[108] The following day local press in Derbyshire and Northumberland reported that miners were 'forming mercy squads to deliver coal to pensioners and other needy people; in the latter case the miners were reported to have bought the coal themselves and to be hoping to extend the operation.'[109] The *Yorkshire Post* also reported the setting up of 'heat havens' for the elderly in several centres in the Brownhills-Walsall area of the West Midlands with a view to helping these people over a possibly extended period.'[110] During the fifth week of the strike the *Daily Telegraph* reported a rather strange story that Kent miners had 'offered to operate kidney machines etc by hand' if they became affected by the strike.[111] The same day *The Times* reported that Age Concern, in the North East, had blamed the fuel shortage for the deaths of seven elderly people from hypothermia during the past fortnight. However, a subsequent investigation by the DHSS found that none of the deaths were directly attributable to the coal strike.[112]

## 8.10 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the miners enjoyed broad support amongst trade unionists, which went beyond official support and largely comprised decisions taken by trade unionists on the picket lines and in mass meetings following direct contact with miners. The TUC showed itself unwilling to openly support the strike and restricted itself to assurances that trade unionists would not cross picket lines - the bare minimum a trade union organisation would be expected to advocate in the circumstances. In this, it was motivated by a desire not to jeopardise the tripartite talks with the Government and CBI, that were underway and were regarded as more important to the TUC leadership, in giving them equal status with the Government and employers, than advocating open support and assistance for the miners. The widespread support that the miners received from the transport unions was shown not to have been the result of the TUC statement,

[108] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Report, 2 February 1972
[109] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/20, 3 February 1972
[110] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/18, 1 February 1972
[111] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/26, 10 February 1972
[112] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/26, 10 February; PRCS/27, 11-14 February 1972

since it had begun beforehand, though the statement was seen to have sanctioned the widespread placing of picket lines. The assistance of the transport unions, and also of the power workers, reflected both broad support for the miners amongst trade unionists and the wider working class, and conversely hostility towards the Government, which had been exacerbated by the protests against the I.R.Bill a year earlier. In most cases the support of trade unionists in refusing to cross picket lines went beyond that advocated by their respective union leaderships, and in that sense mirrored the actions of the rank-and-file miners themselves.

We saw that the miners received significant and widespread support from students, who identified the miners' struggle as akin to their own dispute with the Government, which was treating the student body in a similar way to that of a trade union. Students were also still influenced by the protests of 1968 and were undergoing something of a turn towards the working class at this time, with the NUSs hoping to be accepted as a constituent member of the TUC. Students used innovative methods in their support for the strike and were seen to be enthusiastic but less disciplined in their actions than were the miners. The NUM leadership praised their support but, with one eye on the battle for public opinion, asked the students to refrain from attending picket lines fearing that they were putting the miners' dispute into a bad light. Support from students was shown not to have been universal and even amongst those who supported the miners dispute some did not want the students own dispute to be subordinate to it. The chapter has shown significant support for the miners from their wives who attended picket lines and played an active political role in speeches, on demonstrations and in the lobby of parliament. The miners also received substantial support from members of the public, and whilst this was not universal public opinion remained on the miners' side throughout the dispute, despite majority disapproval for the methods employed in winning the strike. All sides were aware of the importance of winning the battle over public opinion and attempted to influence it. The Government was seen to have been frustrated by this battle being largely won by the miners and by the general support shown for their claim, even as the results of the strike led to power cuts and workers being laid off. This perhaps accords with Daly's claim at the outset that the miners were in the vanguard of the struggle against the Heath Government, and were seen to be by the wider public.

# Chapter 9

# Saltley

## 9.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the miners' attempt to halt the supply of gas coke from the West Midlands Gas Board's site in Nechells (Saltley), Birmingham in the last period of the strike. It assesses the confrontation that took place between pickets and police and the support that the miners received from thousands of Birmingham engineering workers who joined the miners in a mass picket that eventually closed the depot. This was by far the numerically greatest direct support that the miners received during the dispute, though it lasted for only one day. The closure of the depot came to be seen as the epitome of the strike though it actually had little bearing on the strike's outcome, which was, rather, due to the curtailing of coal transportation and the stranding of stocks. This had already been achieved at the point when the depot was picketed. Nevertheless, the event has attained something of a mythological status primarily because, whilst not instrumental in the success of the strike, it marked its effective end and was a headline-grabbing confrontation that inflicted a severe humiliation on the Heath Government. In this it became revered on the left, and by trade unionists, and used as an example of the potential of the organised working class. This chapter will assess the nature of the subsequent accounts of the events, including the mythology that surrounded the mass picket. It will review the build up to the events, the mass picket, and the means of support given by the Birmingham engineers. It will consider the role of Scargill and the nature of the picketing, and will assess the aftermath to the closure of the depot including the contrast between the Government's response and that of the miners and engineers.

## 9.2 Myth

The most significant numerical support that the miners received from other trade unionists during the strike was that from engineering and car workers during the mass picket at 'Saltley Gate' in Birmingham. There is much mythologising around this event, including its name, given that the confrontation did not actually take place at the gates of Saltley gasworks but on the opposite side of the Saltley Viaduct at the gates of the Nechells gasworks.[1] The Nechells depot has gone down in history as Saltley Gate, or simply Saltley, and though the confrontation was a major public humiliation for the Government it had little direct bearing on the outcome of the strike, which was determined by the halting of coal stocks to power stations. Saltley was unquestionably politically significant but has tended to deflect attention from other aspects of the strike, and its mythological status has had a bearing on later disputes including the 1984-85 miners' strike, which held it up in reverence as an event to be emulated. Much of the myth stems from a 1975 interview Scargill gave in the *New Left Review*, which presents it as the decisive event of the strike.[2] At this point Scargill was a member of the NUM's Yorkshire Area Executive as a representative from the Barnsley Panel, which was responsible for organising the picketing of East Anglia's docks and power stations during the strike. Many accounts of the strike give undue focus to the events at Saltley. Clutterbuck, Whitehead and Beckett have all given it great prominence,[3] whilst others have inflated the role of Scargill, given his later prominence in the 1984-85 strike; Robert Taylor cites 'the Napoleonic style leadership of the young Arthur Scargill', Pelling, Andrew, and Turner all credit Scargill with instigating and leading the action at Saltley: indeed Pelling credits Scargill with leading the entire strike.[4] Morgan refers to 'Scargill's massed legions', and Campbell to 'Scargill's flying pickets'. Beckett calls Scargill 'a relatively junior member of the strike committee' whilst giving him full credit for

[1] Kellaway, R., *Re-examining the Battle of Saltley Gate,* Dissertation, Bristol, 2010, p.3
[2] Scargill, A., 'The New Unionism', Interview, *New Left Review*, Vol.1, No.92, Jul-Aug 1975
[3] Clutterbuck, R.L., *Britain in agony: the growth of political violence,* (London, 1978) pp.64-74; Whitehead, P., *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies,* (London, 1985) pp.75-76; Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies,* (London, 2009) pp.66-86
[4] Taylor, R., *The Trade Union Question in British Politics: Government and Unions since 1945,* (Oxford, 1993) p.198; Pelling, H., *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 4th edn., (Harmondsworth, 1987) p.269; Andrew, C., *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5*, (London 2010) p.593; Turner, A.W., *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s*, (London, 2008) p.13

leading the action at Saltley.[5] Birmingham student Peter Tinsley commented, insightfully, on the dialectical effect of Scargill's role: 'Saltley made Arthur Scargill, but Arthur Scargill made Saltley.'[6] He undoubtedly played a significant role, but History is not served well by reducing complex procedures, involving thousands of people, to an individual, who becomes a symbol or shorthand for the entire event.

Some historians have minimised the role of trade unionists, other than those from the NUM, at the Saltley picket, with Morgan, Middlemas and Scranton failing to mention the presence of non-miners at the confrontation.[7] Geary hugely magnifies the numbers of lorries that called at the depot under normal circumstances in stating that it was four hundred a day, which then doubled during the strike, whereas in fact there were just a few lorries a day, which escalated to hundreds during the strike.[8] Scargill himself claimed there were a thousand lorries a day visiting the site, and that it contained an estimated million tons of coke.[9] Taylor notes that the amount of fuel at Saltley and its significance have been exaggerated in many accounts. At the start of the strike there were one hundred and thirty-eight thousand tons of waste coke left over from the Nechells gasworks' shift to North Sea gas. This had been reduced to one hundred thousand tons by the time of the confrontation, and was one of the key remaining stocks of gas coke in the country, but would be gone entirely within two weeks; there were only twenty thousand tons left by the end of the strike, according to the chairman of West Midlands Gas Board. Additionally, this could not have had a material effect on the power stations, since they do not burn coke.[10]

[5] Morgan, K.O., *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989*, (Oxford, 1990) p.414; Campbell, J., *Edward Heath: A Biography*, (London, 1994) p.415; Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, pp.69-83

[6] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Peter Tinsley

[7] Middlemas, K., *Power, Competition and the State, Vol. 2: Threats to post-war settlement Britain, 1961-74*, (Basingstoke, 1990) p.366; Morgan, *The People's Peace*, pp.326 & 366; Scranton, P., 'From Saltley Gates to Orgreave' in Fine, B. & Millar, R., (Eds.), *Policing the miners' strike*, (London, 1985) p.150

[8] Geary, R., *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985*, (Cambridge, 1985) p.73

[9] Scargill, 'The New Unionism', p.15

[10] Crick, M., *Scargill and the Miners*, (Harmondsworth, 1985) p.61; Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.62

## 9.3 Build-Up

As the strike neared the end of the first month, and with picketing increasingly successful, fuel stocks were run down and the picketing of power stations and coke depots became the key battle-grounds in the dispute. The stockpile of coke at Saltley began to attract coal merchant's lorries from all over the country. The Government grew increasingly desperate and was determined to win at all costs, and Saltley became the chosen site for a last ditch test of strength.[11] The Government, which was determined to keep the depot open, allocated large police numbers who were instructed 'that under no circumstances whatsoever are the gates of Saltley to be closed.'[12] The depot was initially picketed by just a few miners from Staffordshire and Coventry, and Ernest Smith, a shop steward at Cartwright, who lived nearby commented: 'I used to come past this pathetic sight of just these few pickets, against a mighty army of police.'[13] Given the low level of stocks throughout the country the Government had made a request for the depot to supply priority customers only but noted that, whilst the depot supplied priority consumers first, it felt 'under no obligation not to supply others.'[14] In normal circumstances the depot had received around three coal merchants' lorries daily but was suddenly receiving, and filling, hundreds of lorries per day from all over the country including Wales, Cornwall, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Scotland, which queued along the roads to the depot for up to a mile. The *Birmingham Evening Mail* on 3 February estimated six hundred and fifty to seven hundred lorries per day visiting the depot and quoted a lorry driver from Bolton saying, 'I'm amazed they haven't started picketing it already'.[15]

As the number of lorries grew local pickets called for reinforcements and on the afternoon of Saturday 5 February the NUM in London phoned several regional NUM headquarters including the Barnsley Area NUM, which had become the centre for organising flying pickets to East Anglia, and asked for two hundred pickets to go to 'Nechells Green'. Scargill admitted he had never heard of the place but set about redirecting Yorkshire pickets from East Anglia and contacted

[11] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.25
[12] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.3, John Podmore
[13] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Ernest Smith, Shop steward, Cartwright, Birmingham
[14] TNA: CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February 1972
[15] Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, p.67; Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) p.57

Emlyn Williams, South Wales NUM vice president, for additional help. Scargill's recollection of their conversation has perhaps benefited from knowledge of subsequent events: 'When I told him I wanted a thousand he said "Good God man! Do you realise bloody Wales are playing England?" And I said "Do you realise the working class are playing the ruling class in the battle of the century!"'[16] Scargill redirected up to four hundred pickets to Birmingham, and then drove there himself that night arriving in the early hours of the morning. He went directly to the CP headquarters, where the Barnsley pickets had been accommodated by Scargill's 'old friend' Frank Watters (CP district secretary in Birmingham, who had been an NUM activist in Yorkshire), and was briefed on the situation at the depot.[17] Scargill established a command post opposite the depot gates on a small triangular traffic island, which held a public-toilet. From the roof of this the whole scene could be surveyed and lorries could be seen approaching. It was, incidentally, also the only public toilets in the vicinity and pickets and police were obliged to stand shoulder to shoulder at the urinals, before leaving to join opposite sides of the picket lines.[18] Geary's estimate of the growth of the picket is as follows:

**Table 9.1. Numbers, Injuries & Arrests at Saltley Depot.**[19]

| Date 1972 | Pickets | Police | Injuries | Arrests | Lorries Entering |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fri 4 Feb. | 200 | 48 (est) | - | - | 596 |
| Sat 5 Feb. | 130 | 48 | - | 2 | 320 |
| Sun 6 Feb. | 200 | 48 | - | 2 | - |
| Mon 7 Feb. | 2,000 | 400 | 9 (8 police) | 21 | 47 |
| Tue 8 Feb. | 2,000 | 400 | 18 (6 police) | 18 | 39 |
| Wed 9 Feb. | 2,000 | 400 | 4 (2 police | 25 | 43 |
| Thu 10 Feb. | 15,000 | 800 | 1 (1 police) | 8 | 10 |
| Total | | | 32 | 76 | |

According to Government records, by 7 February about five hundred pickets were at the site (from Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland) facing two hundred and fifty to three hundred police. Lorries from across Britain

[16] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.3, Arthur Scargill, NUM Yorkshire Area Executive
[17] Scargill, 'The New Unionism', p.15
[18] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Peter Tinsley; Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, pp.73-4
[19] Source: Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, Table 7, p.77

were queueing when the gates opened but miners hurling pies, fruit and eggs turned most of them away. A picket lay down in front of a lorry but was hauled to safety by police. Seconds later he lay down again in front of a second lorry and was then arrested. In all there were more than twenty arrests.[20] The DTI reported that on Tuesday 8 February that there were then one thousand pickets and around four hundred police, though the NUM in Barnsley had received a report on 7 February that there were some six to seven hundred police at the depot.[21]

Yorkshire miner, Arnold Cooke, recalled the nature of the conversation pickets were having with lorry drivers: 'We're picketing miners, we've been on strike now for seven weeks. We're fighting for a living, same as you'll be fighting for a living some day, and we shall help you out.' From the Tuesday, larger police numbers allowed the police to prevent pickets from approaching lorries, and lorries were waved through instead of, as previously, the police allowing pickets the opportunity to speak with the drivers. Police instructed lorries to accelerate on approach to keep the traffic moving faster, and this greater speed put both pickets and police at risk. The huge numbers of pickets arriving created logistical problems, not least in the need to accommodate them. The TGWU premises were used as a clearing house and a number of trade unionists, students and local CP and Labour activists put up pickets in their homes, and they were also accommodated at the Working Men's Club and the Irish Club in the city centre. Labour activist Moira Simmonds was tasked with finding sleeping quarters and she found private accommodation for two hundred miners, and also made use of student halls. She believed that by giving hospitality people felt they had a real stake in the strike. Sylvia Sabin, shop steward at SU Carburettors, and her husband, put up six pickets in their house. In addition to accommodation people also provided food, and mobile canteens providing tea, soup and hot pies turned up at the picket line, which raised the miners' spirits. On Wednesday 9 February, the day before the mass picket, women from SU Carburettors bought up all the cigarettes, chocolate and crisps from the factory canteen and went down to the picket during their lunch hour and handed these out to the miners. Yorkshire miner, John Forrester, was taken with the show of support the miners received: 'I was amazed. Utterly amazed at the consideration that other people were hurtling

[20] TNA: POWE14/2661, Internal news item, 7 February; PREM15/985, PRCS/23, 7 February 1972

[21] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/24, 8 February; NUM: 1972 Strike File, Panel Report, 7 February 1972, cited in Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) p.224

out towards the miners. You know, they're somebody they'd never seen in their lives before... Goodness was that easy to come by.'[22]

### 9.4 Birmingham Engineers

On 8 February Watters sought permission for the miners to address local shop stewards for help to shut the depot from Arthur Harper, member of Birmingham Trades Council and president of the AUEW East District.[23] This was agreed and the following evening Scargill and other miners spoke at various meetings of the AUEW, TGWU, NUGMW and National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB), and the local CP and Labour Party. Scargill addressed a mass meeting of the AUEW East District committee, who were planning a one-day strike in their own wage dispute with the Government, and told them: 'We don't want your pound notes'… 'Will you go down in history as the working class in Birmingham who stood by while the miners were battered - or will you become immortal? I do not ask, I demand that you come out on strike.'[24] The AUEW shop stewards agreed to solidarity action between the unions after the West District committee met the following day. Delegations of miners also toured local factories and the Trades Council placed an advert in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* calling for support for the miners. John Mitchell, from Keresley colliery, Warwickshire, spoke at one meeting telling them: 'It's not the miners that are under attack, it's the working class and the Trade Union movement of this country.'[25] The appeal for assistance from the miners was the green light the Birmingham engineers needed to join the picket, Harper noted: 'Scargill did come to the district committee and give permission, the go-ahead, 'cos we couldn't be accused of poking our nose into somebody else's dispute, you know, the press'd make great play of this.'[26] The response from the trade unionists and shop stewards put pressure on the local leadership to support the strike. From early on 10 February shop stewards at factory meetings across Birmingham put the proposal to support the miners to

[22] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.4, Moira Simmonds, Birmingham Borough Labour Party; p.5, un-named miner; SaltleyII, p.12, John Forrester, Yorkshire Main colliery, Yorkshire; p.13, Arnold Cooke, Woolley colliery, Yorkshire; MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper, AUEW, Birmingham; Watters, F., *Being Frank: The Memoirs of Frank Watters*, (Doncaster, 1992) pp.64-9

[23] Kellaway, *Re-examining the Battle* p.3; Watters, *Being Frank*, p.63

[24] Watters, *Being Frank*, p.71; Scargill, 'The New Unionism', pp.17-8

[25] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.17, John Mitchell, Keresley colliery, Warwickshire

[26] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper

rank-and-file votes, which largely received majority support. Cartwright shop steward Ernest Smith recalled a huge support for solidarity action:

> we went to our members, very few - hardly any against it... there was a huge exodus, the factory emptied, and they were solid behind the banner. Everybody stopped work, make no bones about that, nobody worked, if everybody didn't march - and we think nearly everybody did march, certainly work stopped.[27]

Rover shop steward John Harris remembered being harassed by rank-and-file members to write a resolution in support of the miners, so that they could stop work and go and support the picket: 'They were asking me what I was going to do about it... From there on in, until the factory closed down by everybody walking out, I didn't get a minute's peace'.[28] The AUEW, NUVB and TGWU agreed to solidarity action, whilst EETPU and NUGMW rank-and-file activists tried to get their members out unofficially after their local leadership refused to call official action. The numbers of pickets sent by the Barnsley strike committee, and their approach in seeking support from Birmingham engineers, went beyond the NUM leadership's intentions and showed that both Scargill and the pickets were operating independently of the NEC.[29] Harper recalled fighting a losing battle in trying to encourage those with health issues to take transport down to the picket rather than to march there for fear that they may harm themselves:

> there were people there, you know, people that'd got bad hearts and shouldn't, you know, exert themselves or so forth, and we went amongst 'em, weeding 'em out, saying 'Use your head, go down on the bus, or go down by car, if you want to go'... anyhow they told us where to go.[30]

NUVB shop steward Bob Smith, who lost a leg during the war, was one of those encouraged not to march, but who had insisted on doing so. He recalled his reasons for marching:

> we were going to back the miners, right up to the hilt, we were going to get them gates closed... I was very proud and so were the boys, to support them

[27] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Ernest Smith
[28] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.18, John Harris, Senior shop steward, Rover, Birmingham
[29] Phillips, J., 'The 1972 miners' strike: popular agency and industrial politics in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.20, No.2, 2006, p.201; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer*, p.59; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners*, (Shipley, 1981) p.198; Watters, *Being Frank*, p.72
[30] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper

> for the good cause they were fighting for, for humanity, and the right to good wages and a good living standard.[31]

Police stopped coaches of Welsh miners en route to Saltley that morning and searched them for weapons as a means of delaying them, but the miners got out and walked the rest of the way to the depot, with some building workers leaving their sites and joining them along the way.[32] Some forty thousand engineers walked out on a one-day strike and large contingents of these marched to Saltley with banners flying. The police report estimated a peak of fifteen thousand pickets from across the West Midlands.[33] Harper noted the total support for action at the Tractors and Transmissions factory:

> The whole factory came out to a man, I should say around four thousand people, and we marched on Saltley… We marched up to that gate and stuck, solid, a solid wall of humanity, and the police were powerless. They was licked. They was licked and they know'd it'.[34]

A collier from Maerdy described the arrival of thousands of factory workers at the Saltley depot: 'They just come in and come in and come in until there was no more room for anybody. There was still people up the road.'[35] According to Beckett, in addition to the trade unionists, 'There were women holding shopping bags. There were pensioners. There were people with small children.'[36]

## 9.5 Confrontation

The confrontation at Saltley lasted around five days, during which fifteen pickets and seventeen police were injured (the DTI gives these figures as seven pickets and twenty police) and there were seventy-five arrests,[37] though before the arrival of mass pickets the *Birmingham Post* reported that it had been almost completely peaceful with only four arrests in three days.[38] On the day of the closure itself

[31] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Bob Smith, NUVB Shop steward, Birmingham
[32] Watters, *Being Frank*, pp.69-70
[33] LB: Birmingham City Police, *The Miners' Strike 1972. Picketing of West Midlands Gas Board Premises in Birmingham*, (undated) cited in Taylor, *The NUM, Volume 2*, p.61
[34] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper
[35] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.8, Un-named miner, Maerdy colliery, South Wales
[36] Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, p.82
[37] TNA: FV38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972, Annex S, Schedule on picketing incidents; Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, Table 7, p.77
[38] *Birmingham Pos*t, 5 February 1972, cited in Kellaway, *Re-examining the Battle,* p.20

there was very little actual violence in part because when the engineers arrived it became impossible for any lorries to enter the depot. The mass picket from the Monday onwards led to pushing and shoving between pickets and police and reports of kicking on both sides, which led to some injuries and a number of arrests.[39] Chief Constable of Birmingham, Sir Derek Capper explained that 'in trying to hold back large crowds struggles develop, it is understandable that minor injuries occur to both the police and demonstrators'.[40] Geary reasons that mass pushing and shoving 'can be seen as a solution to the problem of making picketing effective without resorting to violence'.[41] However, there certainly was some actual violence evident on both sides of the lines, though on the day after the closure the *Birmingham Post* remarked: 'Behind the headlines of punch-ups and arrests - there has been good natured discourse between pickets and police outside the gates of Saltley this week and there has been humour full and unconditional'.[42] A British Gas report later also found that until its climactic stages: 'Notwithstanding the evidence of violence depicted in the media... relations between police and pickets on the whole remained friendly and low key.'[43] Geary argues that the bulk of the picketing during the strike was peaceful but even in the exceptional cases where scuffles took place between pickets and police it amounted to little more than 'spirited pushing and shoving', and that whilst Saltley is often depicted as an extreme example of industrial violence and the ultimate manifestation of anarchy, the picketing amounted to 'large numbers of strikers pushing against smaller numbers of police.'[44] The nature of the policing and the accusations of violence are discussed further in Chapter Ten. The huge numbers of pickets forced Capper, to close the gates, both for safety concerns and because lorries were unable to reach them through the crowd. He recalled the events some years later:

> I decided that the situation was such that we ought to get the gates closed and avoid the use of excessive force to move them... if we'd decided to move them by force, there would have been a considerable amount of injury. And I quite honestly didn't feel... with so few lorries wanting to get in, that it really required that use of force to move these people and causing that injury - which would have had repercussions for some years.[45]

[39] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes,* p.77
[40] *The Times*, 9 February 1972
[41] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes,* p.114
[42] *Birmingham Pos*t, 11 February 1972, cited in Kellaway, *Re-examining the Battle*, p.21
[43] Cited in Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out,* p.76
[44] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes,* pp.77-8
[45] LB: MS4000/2/152/3, Interview, Sir Derek Capper, Chief Constable, West Midlands, BBC1, 26 August 1975

Capper then asked Scargill to do him 'a favour' and disperse the crowd. Scargill agreed on condition that he could make a speech, which was accepted, and he then spoke, standing on the toilet-block, using a police loudhailer, and gave a speech to the crowd, thanking them and telling them that it was the greatest victory of the working class in his lifetime.[46] Bob Smith and Peter Tinsley recalled a change in the attitude of the police after the gates had been closed:

> Well the attitude of the coppers when we got there. Well they were a bit rough, they were pushing and they couldn't care less whether you were a cripple or what you were, but we did close the gates. That was it. Their attitude changed then - friendly, "You've done a good job, boys", yea, but they were disgusted, that we'y'd beat.

> The policemen pushed you around on the first three days and then … the policemen sort of directed us onto the pavement, "Would you mind walking on the pavement, Sir." And that's the first time any of us had been called Sir by a policeman for about five days.[47]

## 9.6 Response

The Cabinet were told that Capper had been obliged to close the depot and concluded that this outcome 'represented a victory for violence against the lawful activities of the Gas Board and the coal merchants' and 'provided disturbing evidence of the ease with which, by assembling large crowds, militants could flout the law with impunity'.[48] The events at Saltley, and the strike in general, led to a reassessment by the Government of its approach to the policing of such events. The Cabinet had already discussed possible changes to the law on picketing and the events at Saltley gave this process further impetus (discussed in Chapter Ten). The mass picket at Saltley shook the Government to its core and Ministers in general felt that the flagrant breaches of the law had so undermined the Government's and police's capacity to enforce it that they were alarmed at a new and disturbing attitude among some sections of society towards laws with which they disagreed.[49] Thatcher later wrote:

[46] Scargill, 'The New Unionism', p.19; Watters, *Being Frank*, p.70
[47] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Bob Smith & Peter Tinsley
[48] TNA: CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February 1972
[49] TNA: CAB130/553, GEN78(72), MC Coalminers' Pay Dispute, 4th Meeting, 15 February 1972

> For me what happened at Saltley took on no less significance than it did for the Left. I understood as they did that the struggle to bring trade unions properly within the rule of law would be decided not in the debating chamber of the House of Commons, nor even on the hustings, but in and around the pits and factories where intimidation had been allowed to prevail.[50]

The Government's disgust at the events at Saltley contrasted with the views of those who took part. Yorkshire miner Ian Ferguson felt that the significance of Saltley was that it showed: 'how the struggle of the miners had the involvement of other sections of the working class, other industries, it's a sort of a record that we must have - a working class record... it's a question of class loyalties.'[51] Engineers and miners both found it to be an emotional and unifying experience:

> I was very proud, that everybody, all nationalities was there, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, the lot - and they were united.
>
> it was a massive exhibition, an emotional exhibition, there's no doubt about that. I saw miners crying - but I saw car-workers crying, you know, as well as miners.
>
> I felt proud to be a part, that particular day, of the working class, who showed all the finer things of human nature.
>
> the miners did us a good turn in Birmingham, that day, cos they united the trade union movement of Birmingham, of all Trade Unions, that'd been falling out with one another, and this day, they united Birmingham.[52]

Therein lay the true historical significance of Saltley. It was not an event that was instrumental in the miners' victory, but it was hugely significant in its symbolic importance. It served to demonstrate the strength and potential of the organised and unified working class. In these respects, it alarmed the Government, and indeed the NUM leadership also.

[50] Thatcher, M., *The Path to Power*, (London, 1995) p.218
[51] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.1, Ian Ferguson, NUM, Yorkshire
[52] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Bob Smith, Ernest Smith, Colin Fitzer, Arthur Harper

## 9.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the events around the mass picket of the Nechells depot in Birmingham, known colloquially as Saltley. This saw miners receive substantial support from thousands of Birmingham engineers and car-workers, on a one-day walkout and march to Saltley that forced the closure of the coke depot. Whilst this confrontation did not actually play a part in the miners' victory, it was seen to have inflicted a major defeat on the Government, which had chosen to ensure that the depot remained symbolically open in a last-ditch test of strength. The support that the miners received was sought at mass meetings of engineering workers and shop stewards, who then put pressure on their respective leaderships to walk out. This support had its roots in the ideals of trade union solidarity, and both the miners and the engineers themselves identified it as a unifying and emotional experience. This was in part due to the Conservative Government being the focus of the revolt, and built upon the previous year's demonstrations by trade unionists against the I.R.Act legislation (discussed in Chapter Ten). The Government, which had put great store in the symbolism of keeping the gates open, knew that the closure of the depot marked their effective, public, defeat in the strike, and that it had become a symbolism of a different kind. The confrontation led them to concede the miners' demands following the Wilberforce Inquiry, which was appointed the day after the closure.

The significance of the role played by Scargill in the events at Saltley is a little difficult to unpick. Some reports, not least his own, give him full credit and responsibility, others downplay both his significance, and indeed the significance of the Saltley mass picket itself. It is clear that he played an instrumental role in a number of respects: in diverting South Yorkshire pickets from picketing in East Anglia towards Birmingham as part of his role as organiser of the Barnsley flying pickets, which went beyond the numbers sought by the NEC; in making direct appeals to the Birmingham engineers, via his links to the CP organiser Watters, to join the mass picket; and in his impassioned speeches. However, his role has been magnified by his *New Left Review* interview, which many subsequent accounts have drawn upon, and, primarily, by his subsequent leadership of the NUM during the 1984-85 strike, which led many to seek the roots of his later leadership in his earlier actions. The significance of the confrontation at Saltley itself is also nuanced. It was not at all significant in the miners' victory in the

strike itself, which had already been decided elsewhere by this point, however, it was very significant as a signal of the Government's defeat, and as an emblem of the united working class. It came to be revered and held up as an example of the possibilities for a future repeat if the working-class and/or trade union movement could become similarly organised and motivated. This arguably had disastrous consequences in 1984-85, not least because Saltley itself was not a strategy for winning a strike. That required the kind of rank-and-file organisation seen in the 1972 strike, but which was largely absent from the later strike, not least because Scargill himself did not wish to transform the dispute into a wider working-class challenge to the Thatcher Government.

# Chapter 10

## Policing and the Law

### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the legal aspects of the strike, in particular the nature of the policing and the application of the Law. It will consider the relations between the pickets and the police, which was initially largely good natured, and assess the balance of responsibilities that the police had to weigh in protecting both the rights of the pickets and of those who wished to work. It will consider the changes to policing in the period before the strike, and the change of tactics as the strike developed, in particular with respect to the co-operation between police forces known as 'mutual aid'. The chapter will address the Heath Government's allegation that the miners' success was 'a victory for violence', an allegation belied by the Government's own earlier statements and by evidence from a number of sources, which demonstrates that the picketing was largely peaceful and legal. It will consider the notion of 'intimidation' and the way that its use developed during the strike. The chapter will review the industrial relations legislation introduced by the Heath Government and the considerations that both Labour and the Conservatives gave to the incidence of unofficial strikes and the consequent desire to counter these, in what Wrigley and Philips call 'the politicisation of industrial relations'.[1] It will show that governments of both stripes sought, primarily, to strengthen the hand of the official trade union leadership against the militant or 'unofficial' element, and that Government plans consequently won the approval of the official leadership, and that opposition to

[1] Wrigley, C., (Ed.), *Documents in Contemporary History: British Trade Unions 1945 – 1995*, (Manchester, 1997) p.28; Phillips, J., 'Industrial Relations, Historical Contingencies and Political Economy: Britain in the 1960s and 1970s', *Labour History Review*, Vol.72, No.3, December 2007, p.227

the legislation came largely from militant sections of the rank-and-file. The chapter will consider the Industrial Relations Act as a part of the Heath Government's desire to confront the public sector and contain wage rises in pursuit of its attempts to rein in inflation. It will demonstrate that the Cabinet became frustrated at the effectiveness of the picketing and its own inability to curb this, which led it to seek grounds for prosecution and ultimately changes to the Law. The chapter will consider the changes sought by the government in the aftermath of the strike to strengthen the effectiveness of the police, in an atmosphere where picketing was being seen as subversive. It will review the changes made and planned by the Heath Government with regard to welfare benefits for those on strike, and will show that this was intended to put financial pressure onto both the unions and the strikers.

## 10.2 Pickets and Police

Relations between pickets and the police during the strike, and prior to Saltley, were largely good, with Morgan recalling that in the interviews he undertook there were few complaints about the police and sometimes praise for their behaviour.[2] Beckett cites a police officer who identified with the pickets' plight in saying that the police 'were on poor money too, so we… had sympathy with the miners.'[3] Warwickshire miner's wife Tina Dogherty recalled that during the miners' rally in London, she was a bit frightened by the crowd: 'I walked beside the policeman all the time I was there. I kept telling him, "if anything happens don't you run away and leave me, cause my man's way up front." He was laughing... he sang songs with us.'[4] However, a survey of police attitudes towards trade unionism, undertaken by Reiner, found that rank-and-file policemen felt that senior officers often restrained them from fully enforcing the law during industrial disputes.[5] Geary notes that Superintendents he spoke with were aware of the frustrating effect policing such disputes had on junior officers, and the problem of maintaining morale and good spirits, given the long hours worked away from home and families. However, they also noted that 'you cannot do a

[2] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Morgan, p.26
[3] Beckett, A., *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies,* (London, 2009) p.78
[4] LB: MS4000/2/152/3, Actuality, Tina Dogherty
[5] Reiner, R., 'Police and Picketing', *New Society*, 7 July 1977, p.14, cited in Geary, R., *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1893 to 1985,* (Cambridge, 1985) p.125

policeman's job and remain an angel. If you do a policeman's job you are bound to know all the dirty tricks.'[6] This points to senior officers weighing the police role as keepers of the peace, against their role as enforcers of the law, which highlights the problems faced by the police in balancing responsibilities and obligations. The Home Office noted that the enforcement of the law in any particular case is entirely a matter for the police, that each police force will have its own instructions, and that the enforcement of the law relating to picketing is a delicate task; the police are expected to demonstrate strict impartiality between the pickets and those who wish to continue to work, and it is commonplace to receive complaints from a single incident that the police were both too lax in enforcing the law and also unduly oppressive.[7] Geary notes that the obligation of the police to balance these conflicting rights are fine in theory,

> but bear little relation to the reality of a strike situation. A non-union driver being paid high bonuses precisely to drive through picket lines is hardly likely to listen to peaceful persuasion, while picketing entirely within the law is likely to be wholly ineffective.[8]

The Home Office sent a circular to all Chief Constables in England and Wales during the first week of the strike, which reminded them of the law on picketing and required them to submit immediate reports of any disorder or threat of disorder connected with the strike, and also weekly reports containing a general assessment of the extent and location of picketing in their Areas.[9] This was undertaken largely with a view to finding grounds to prosecute pickets, both to undermine the picketing, and therefore the strike, but also with one eye on public opinion. The telexes submitted by the police in response catalogue just fourteen reports of disorder, or threat of disorder, out of nine hundred and forty-eight picketing 'events' (1.5%). The vast majority of the reports talk of; peaceful picketing, no disturbances, no disorder or threat of disorder, no untoward incidents, and many also report that relations between the police and the pickets are good or even excellent.[10] In his memoirs, Heath was critical of the police whom he described as 'weak, and frightened of a scrap with the pickets' and he

[6] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes,* p.113
[7] TNA: HO325/99, E(72)1, Note on Picketing, Chairman, OC Emergencies, 14 January; Note, Hilary to Evans, 25 January 1972
[8] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes,* p.74
[9] HO325/99, E(72)1, Note on Picketing, Chairman, Official Committee (OC) on Emergencies, 14 January; Note, Hilary to Evans, 25 January 1972
[10] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, English & Welsh Constabularies to Home Office, 17 January - 14 February 1972

further condemned their 'softly, softly approach' as 'disastrous'.[11] Coal merchants were also reportedly calling for 'sterner measures by the police', and for 'stronger police protection from pickets', though the Government countered that the 'police are of course neutral.'[12] The Board approached the police early in the strike to request assistance in maintaining supplies to priority consumers, if it should be needed, but was later critical of the police priority for keeping the peace at the cost of practical disregard for the rights of those who wanted to go to work. It criticised an 'excess of caution' in police actions and a lack of appetite for confrontation:

> It is possible that a greater determination might have succeeded in many places and it is idle for the Police to speak of the absence of serious bodily injury as a measure of success. Yorkshire has seen a virtual breakdown of law and order and the Police have only escaped defiance by lack of determined action. This is failure, not success.[13]

The police also faced practical difficulties when making an arrest in deciding the appropriate moment at which to arrest selected pickets who broke the law, and particularly in obtaining eye witnesses to give evidence.[14] The NCB recognised the difficulties faced by the police but noted that the issue lay primarily in enforcement, since the police would have to be willing to prosecute. The Board believed that this willingness varied widely and was 'particularly low in areas where the police were drawn from and based on mining districts.'[15] It noted that action was a matter for the police and that their concern, primarily, was to keep the peace, but it felt that it should encourage the police to keep picket numbers down, not to ignore flagrant breaches of the law, and if possible to concentrate on 'ring-leaders'. The Board considered that it only made sense to pursue individuals for prosecution if it would make a significant difference, that is, 'if it removed from the picket line leaders whose presence would make a real difference. It is no good getting an injunction against "A" if his place would immediately be taken by "B".'[16]

[11] Heath, E., *The Course of My Life*, (London, 1999) pp.350-353
[12] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/6, 18 January; PRCS/7, 19 January 1972
[13] TNA: COAL78/1908, Letter, Menheneott to Roy, 14 January; COAL31/300, Letter, Glover to Brass, 28 January 1972
[14] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 3rd Meeting, 28 January 1972
[15] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Glover to Brass, 28 January 1972
[16] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Jeffries to Board members and regional directors, 31 January 1972

### 10.3 Changes to Policing

Legislation governing police forces in England and Wales had been updated under the Police Act 1964, which constituted new police authorities and allowed for the amalgamation of existing forces into more efficient units. Between 1965 and 1969 the number of police forces in England and Wales was reduced from one hundred and seventeen to forty-nine. The new forces were under the control of a Chief Constable, and were primarily based on counties. Consequently, the number of police officers were spread over much wider force areas than previously. The larger size of individual forces militated against local control and increased the influence of both the Chief Constables and the Home Office. During the period of the strike police numbers were considered to be under-strength by an estimated 13,454 (12.3%) in 1971 and by 11,847 (10.7%) in 1972. In addition, officers had no recent experience of industrial unrest on the scale of the miners' strike. The centralisation process had the effect of constraining police reaction to industrial disorder and led to 'the development of such non-violent tactics as 'the cordon and the wedge', which allowed the police to enforce the law without overstepping political limitations. [17]

Both the miners and the police adapted their tactics as the strike progressed, in response to each other and the developing situation; the miners' tactic of moving a large force of pickets from one pit to another to concentrate their effectiveness, led to police doing the same, with the police, for example, deploying their forces strategically during the fourth week in Derbyshire and Yorkshire,[18] and in particular at Saltley. The Police Act had made particular provision for assistance to be given by one force to another 'to meet any special demand on resources', which came to be known as mutual aid, and this developed during the strike as and when required.[19] Home Office officials later noted that: 'The concentration of large numbers of pickets at certain places calls for well-organised mutual aid between police forces. The dispersal of some thousands of resisting pickets would be a task beyond the resources of any single force outside the metropolis.'[20] Each force was responsible for the way in which police in any particular situation dealt

[17] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, p.125; Taylor, A., *The NUM and British Politics, Volume 2: 1969-1995*, (London, 2005) p.64
[18] TNA: COAL31/416, NCB Situation Reports, 3, 4 & 8 February 1972
[19] Police Act (1964), pp.8-9
[20] TNA: HO325/103, Picketing and Secondary Industrial Action, Note by Officials, 18 May 1972

with pickets, and the Government were keen to learn what had worked best so that it could be applied to other forces both at that time and in future disputes. The Ministerial Committee on Emergencies, meeting at the end of the third week of the strike, noted that:

> The arrangements made by some Chief Officers of Police to establish with the pickets clear limits to the conduct they would consider admissible had proved successful in improving police control and in keeping down the numbers involved in picketing; and the Home Office would consider if this experience could suitably be brought to the attention of the police in other areas.[21]

A month after the strike the Home Office contacted police headquarters about 'the need for more (albeit discreet) training in the techniques of crowd control.' It noted that it might also be necessary, in some future emergency, 'to organise mutual aid on a larger scale than had hitherto been contemplated' particularly if there were a need to secure certain government objectives in the national interest, and hoped that this might be discussed at the Association of Chief Police Officers conference.[22] The police responded following the conference to say that Chief Constables had accepted the proposals for a National Mutual Aid scheme, but hoped that it would never have to be put into operation.[23]

### 10.4 A Victory for Violence?

The strike was denounced as 'a victory for violence', initially by Maudling in Cabinet on being told of the closure of the gates at Saltley, then by Heath publicly in the strike's immediate aftermath, and some years later by Thatcher in her autobiography.[24] *New Statesman* saw Heath's speech as one 'deliberately designed to create an atmosphere of unease' and an attempt to explain away the Government's defeat by implying that 'the chief characteristic of the strike had been violence at the power stations', which it believes 'could hardly be further from the truth.'[25] There are disagreements in the literature regarding the extent of the violence that occurred in the strike. Phillips challenges the view that it was 'a

[21] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 3rd Meeting, 28 January 1972
[22] TNA: HO325/103, Letter, Allen to White, 23 March 1972
[23] TNA: HO325/103, Letter, White to Allen, 17 April 1972
[24] CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February; PREM15/986, PRCS/37, 25 February 1972; Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, (London, 1995) p.340
[25] *New Statesman*, Editorial, Vol.84, No.2137, 3 March 1972, p.258

victory for violence', seeing it rather as a straightforward industrial dispute.[26] Ashworth, drawing on NCB records, writes that all 'mass actions during the strike' involved 'breaches of law and bore little resemblance to peaceful picketing.'[27] Ledger and Sallis state that the police were frequently outnumbered by large crowds of pickets shoving and pushing and throwing stones at lorries.[28] McCormick contends that, in relation to the number of picket lines, the amount of violence was slight.[29] Geary notes that 'many of the objections against alleged violent picketing are really objections against effective strike action itself.'[30] Violence is defined as behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something, or as the unlawful exercise of physical force or intimidation by the exhibition of such force.[31] Little of the action during the strike falls into either of these definitions, and none, or almost none, of it into the first category; the hostility shown towards the officials and clerical staff crossing the picket lines comes closest, but the intention there was clearly to stop strike-breaking rather than to physically hurt anybody and thus falls more into the second category than the first. The key area of picketing regarded as controversial was the use of mass picketing, which was not inherently violent but can be said to have been intimidating. Geary notes that picketing in the late 1960s and 1970s generally, involved some illegal behaviour such as intimidation, obstruction and the immobilisation of vehicles, but that recourse to actual violence was rare and rather amounted to some pushing and shoving, though this only took place during mass picketing, whereas the majority of picket lines were small scale and peaceful.[32] This appears to have been the case in this strike.

There is some discrepancy concerning the number of pickets in action during the strike, the number of arrests, and the extent of any intimidating behaviour. At the beginning of February 1972, the *Guardian* cited an NUM estimate of some fifty to sixty thousand pickets in action,[33] whereas a week later, Labour MP Eric Varley cited figures during a Commons debate, of one thousand picket lines in

[26] Phillips, J., 'The 1972 miners' strike: popular agency and industrial politics in Britain', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.20, No.2, 2006, p.202
[27] Ashworth, W., *The History of the British Coal Industry, Vol.5, 1946-1982: The Nationalised Industry*, (Oxford, 1986) p.340
[28] Ledger, F. & Sallis, H., *Crisis Management in the Power Industry: an inside story*, (London, 1995) pp.47-50
[29] McCormick, B.J., *Industrial Relations in the Coal Industry*, (London, 1979) p.205
[30] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, p.114
[31] Oxford English Dictionary definition
[32] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, pp.91-3 & 114
[33] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/19, 2 February 1972

operation during the strike involving nine thousand miners but only about twelve violent incidents and about forty-eight arrests.[34] The NUM 1972 conference report backs the figures cited by Varley in claiming that picketing was generally peaceful and that, with over a thousand picket lines in operation across the country for six weeks, there were no more than a dozen incidents of violence reported and with many thousands of pickets on duty each day the numbers involved in violence and arrests were insignificant. The Home Office confirmed the relatively low level of violence, reporting that by 7 February, '61 picketing incidence [sic] had occurred in England and Wales, 37 at pits, 5 at power stations, 19 elsewhere; 130 arrests made; 1 picket killed, 4 police and 6 pickets reported injured.'[35] It seems likely that the 'violence' that occurred was limited to hostile picketing at a small number of locations, except for the picketing of clerical and safety staff, which was more widespread (see Chapter Six), and the high-profile mass picketing such as at Saltley and Longannet.[36]

Government and NCB reports suggest that violence was minimal, and that such violence as occurred did not emanate only from the pickets. The first violent incident noted in the DTI reports, which was within the first few days, took place at a Coalite smokeless fuel works in Grimethorpe, South Yorkshire and involved a 'non-union' driver who refused a request not to enter the works and drove at speed towards the picketed gates, running over a picket's leg and slightly injuring two other men.[37] Lorries moving fuel at the site were subsequently pelted with coke, and by the end of the first week, as picket numbers grew, coal was also being thrown at police.[38] At the end of the third week, towards the mid-point of the strike, the Board reported that 'there is no evidence of violence by pickets at depots', whilst the DTI reports spoke of some violence and intimidation by a limited number of pickets, and the involvement of militant non-miners. The press meanwhile reported the Government's concern about hostile incidents on the picket lines, though police reports received by the DTI 'suggest that picketing has in general been peaceful and that press have exaggerated the incidents arising out of picketing of offices in Wales and the North East.'[39]

[34] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/25, 9 February 1972
[35] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/26, 10 February 1972
[36] KL: KA25/U/Z5, NUM Conference 1972, NEC Report, p.8
[37] TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/1, 9-12 January 1972
[38] *Morning Telegraph* 12 January, cited in Taylor, A., *The Politics of the Yorkshire Miners*, (London, 1984) pp.219-20; TNA: PREM15/984, PRCS/2, 13 January 1972
[39] TNA: COAL31/300, Situation Report, 28 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/15, 28 January; PRCS/16, 29-30 January; PRCS18, 1 February 1972

At the conclusion of the strike, and the day before Heath's speech denouncing the violence on the picket lines, Maudling said in the Commons that 'the vast mass of the picketing was entirely legal' and that 'the union involved certainly did nothing to countenance violence or illegal activity.'[40] He makes a clear distinction here between the moderation of the NUM leadership, and some militant activity by those on the picket lines. The NCB also made a distinction between the NUM's decision-making at national and at local level. The Board wrote to its regional directors mid-way through the strike to set out its concerns at the extent of picketing and its thoughts about what legal remedy might be available to curb this. It noted that the NUM national leadership had issued instructions to pickets concerning the need for peaceful picketing, but that these had seemingly been ignored: 'The most charitable interpretation that can be put upon the facts of the situation is that these instructions have not gone beyond the area offices'.[41]

### 10.5 'Intimidation'

The use of the term 'intimidation' in relation to picketing developed during the strike. A DTI report at the end of January spoke of some violence and intimidation by a limited number of pickets.[42] The NCB's legal opinion at the same time noted that the term 'picket' was derived from military use as an outpost and that a 'picket line' was therefore a contradiction in terms; if pickets 'form themselves into a line and are formed up in depth' then this cannot be said to be for peaceful persuasion but, rather, would be to physically prevent people from going to work and that this amounts to intimidation. Similarly, any more than two or three pickets being allowed to approach the driver of a lorry for the aim of peaceful persuasion would amount to intimidation.[43] The Attorney General, Sir Peter Rawlinson, also used the term in relation to numbers when speaking at the time of the Saltley confrontation, in stating that most of the picketing during the strike had been lawful except in circumstances where there was intimidation, and that such intimidation arguably concerned merely the number of pickets attending rather than their behaviour.[44] A note by Home Office officials some three months

[40] HC Deb, 24 February 1972, vol.831 cc.1486-7
[41] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Jeffries to Board members and regional directors, 31 January 1972
[42] TNA: COAL31/300, Situation Report, 28 January; PREM15/984, PRCS/15, 28 January; PRCS/16, 29-30 January 1972
[43] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Glover to Brass, 28 January 1972
[44] TNA: CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February 1972

after the strike stated that: 'The very presence of excessively large numbers of pickets is itself a form of intimidation.[45] The mass picketing, particularly at Saltley, was therefore equated with intimidation and since intimidation was equated with violence, *ergo* mass picketing was necessarily seen as violent whatever the actual behaviour of those involved. Maudling noted that: 'It is difficult to know in any particular set of circumstances when the right of people to persuade others not to go into a factory becomes intimidation.'[46] Leslie Huckfield (Labour) drew attention to the political convenience of seeing successful picketing as intimidation in noting that: 'If pickets just stand harmlessly and aimlessly by the roadside, that is called peaceful picketing. But if they are successful in turning round a few lorries that is intimidation, in the definition of Conservative members.' Huckfield had attended the mass picket at Saltley and pointed to alternative definitions of intimidation: 'Lorry drivers were telling us time and again that if they did not get a load out of Saltley they would get the sack when they returned… When a driver is told that unless he returns with a load he will get the sack, I call that intimidation. I call that an illegal practice.'[47] The merging of the terms intimidation and violence in part explains the Government's use of the phrase 'a victory for violence' in describing the outcome of the miners' strike.

### 10.6 Policing at Saltley

In his memoirs Heath described the use of mass pickets, particularly at Saltley, as 'the most vivid, direct and terrifying challenge to the rule of law that I could ever recall emerging from within our country'.[48] His denunciation of the strike as a 'victory for violence' was to a large extent based on the events at Saltley, though there is some disagreement as to the extent of the violence that actually took place, and where this violence originated. Scargill's own recollection was that the pickets were on the receiving end of some forceful police behaviour.[49] Brian Bird shop steward at Rover, noted: 'Without doubt brutality was taking place. People

[45] TNA: HO325/103, Note by Officials, 'Picketing and Secondary Industrial Action', 18 May 1972
[46] HC Deb, 14 February 1972, vol.831 c.40
[47] HC Deb, 14 February 1972, vol.831 c.127
[48] Heath, *The Course of My Life*, pp.350-353
[49] LB: MS 4000/2/152/2, SaltleyI, p.7; SaltleyII, p.17, Arthur Scargill

were being kicked and things like this. We thought it was terrible.'[50] A member of the Llantrisant and District strike committee recalled: 'As we got around him (the lorry) the police started to kick. I said, "There's no bloody need for that, we all play Rugby, we can all kick if we want to, we just want to talk to him."'[51] A report from *The Times* suggested that there was aggression on both sides: 'Birmingham police, more used perhaps to dealing with their own at the car factories, appeared to be severe with the miners. Equally, it could be said that not a few officers now bear the marks of pit boots on their shins.'[52] Student Peter Tinsley recalled previous demonstrations that he had been on where there had been some forceful police activity against students who were not able to resist. However, at Saltley: 'the miners came down and the police were backheeling them… but the miners have got big boots, and after they'd used their boots a bit there wasn't much violence, not against people as a mass.'[53] Perhaps the most significant element of the policing at Saltley was the use of enhanced methods including the use of snatch squads and what some miners believed to have been provocateurs in the crowd. Whilst the use of the latter had been suggested earlier in the strike, at NCB headquarters in Tondu and Durham (see Chapter Six), there were several accounts of the use of such methods at Saltley. Harper and Tinsley both recalled the operation of police snatch squads:

> ... what the coppers was doing, was sorting the big lads out from the crowd, and sending four blokes in, you know, they'd all say we're spies in the crowd, and they were sending teams of four or five, to pull the big lads out of the crowd, to rope 'em in.
>
> You saw people being pulled out of the crowd, basically a random process... Towards the end I often got the impression they were going for the young faces, ones in beards, the ones who tended to look as though they were students. They were the ones who certainly came up in court.[54]

Several Maerdy miners noticed infiltration of the picket by unknown forces; Alun Jones observed that 'someone or somebody was trying to push us into a battle with the police' and Mike Richards that 'A young fellow on a picket, well, I mean he could be a student, he could be anyone.' Picket organiser John Podmore claimed:

[50] LB: MS 4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.11, Brian Bird, Shop steward, Rover, Birmingham
[51] LB: MS 4000/2/152/2, Miners' Strike, Appendix II, p.9, Interview, Llantrisant and District SC
[52] *The Times*, 8 February 1972
[53] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Peter Tinsley
[54] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Arthur Harper & Peter Tinsley

> Quite a number of men were coming down there in boiler-suits and they were drivers from such and such a firm - but we were rather suspicious. Because the funny part about it was they were all big men. There was no small men amongst them... Whether they were there against us, or whether they were looking for problems with Trotsky groups, I don't know. But they were there, the police. It's complicated and it can be very dangerous if you don't know who's who.[55]

Scargill recalled seeing plain clothes officers in the crowd with 'a copy of *The Morning Star* in one pocket and *The Workers' Press* in the other, shouting: "Shove the Bastards!" and as soon as you did you were arrested.'[56] Colin Fitzer and John Forrester both pointed to a more organised and provocative approach by the police:

> the police at the back would push you towards the row of police at the front. And they themselves would push back, and kick back, and so it was like cattle hemmed in, really, and of course the obvious reaction then was for you to push back and led to scuffles and fights but it ... all sort of seemed, somewhat prearranged, and all conceived as a provocative manner.[57]

> The police were there to suppress miners from doing any lawful bloody act. It made no difference what you were going to do, just stand there hollering or stand there keeping your mouth shut, they were going to agitate you into a situation where they could do something about it, to try and get you going.[58]

The oral history evidence cited above points to a change in police tactics, but also to the involvement of forces beyond normal policing, perhaps Special Patrol Group forces. The decision for this change in approach must have come from the Home Office. Geary believes that there is little doubt that the Government influences the policing of industrial disputes, in overall approach and in particular decisions, despite official claims of police neutrality. A Chief Constable told him that, given the Heath Government's credibility depended on them making a stand against the miners, particularly at Saltley, [Chief Constable] 'Capper must have been under tremendous political pressure to keep that Saltley depot working.'[59] Policing, and the control of civil and industrial unrest, was in part informed by

[55] LB: MS4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.14, Alun Jones, Mike Richards & John Podmore, Maerdy
[56] Scargill, A., 'The New Unionism', Interview, *New Left Review*, Vol.1, No.92, Jul-Aug 1975, p.15
[57] LB: MS1611/B/9/2, Actuality, Colin Fitzer, Treasurer TGWU, Rover, Solihull
[58] LB: MS 4000/2/152/2, SaltleyII, p.15, John Forrester
[59] Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, pp.125-6

the views of the wider security forces, in an environment in which 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland were coming to the fore. A few months after the strike *The Times* interviewed a number of officers at the UK land forces headquarters in Wiltshire. Brigadier Brian Watkins told the paper:

> The whole period of the miners' strike made us realize that the present size of the police force is too small. It is based on the fundamental philosophy that we are a law-abiding country, but things have now got to the state where there are not enough resources to deal with the increasing numbers who are not prepared to respect the law.[60]

These views fed into Government thinking, particularly Heath's own obsession with subversion in the unions and his difficulty in believing that the way that the strike had developed was not planned conspiratorially.[61] This process led to a further politicisation of industrial relations as the Government sought to disempower, and even criminalise, effective picketing.

## 10.7 Changes to Welfare Benefits

The politicisation of industrial relations also took the form of financial pressure applied by the Heath Government to those on strike. This was initially contained in the Social Security Act 1971, which introduced 'more stringent rules' with regard to the assessment of eligibility to supplementary benefit 'whereby the benefit covers the requirement of a striker's family but not of himself'. Prior to the Act, strikers were allowed £4.35 per week of strike pay plus tax refunds, and this would not result in any penalty or deduction of supplementary benefit claimed by their family, though amounts above £4.35 were subject to a one hundred percent deduction. The Act reduced the £4.35 'disregard' to just £1.00 per week. Cabinet minutes during the strike refer to reports of 'miners' surprise and dissatisfaction at the level of benefits actually paid', since the effect of the change in law had 'not previously been felt in a strike'.[62] The Government sought to claw back supplementary benefit from any miner's family who received or

[60] *The Times*, 23 May 1972

[61] TNA: PREM15/984, Note, Armstrong to Trend, 21 January; PREM15/986, Memo, Heath to Trend, 21 February 1972

[62] CAB/128/50/2, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 11 January; PREM 15/984, PRCS/10, 22-23 January 1972; Booth, A. & Smith, R., 'The Irony of the Iron Fist: Social Security and the Coal Dispute 1984-85', *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol.12, No.3, Winter 1985, pp.366

benefited from allowances paid by the NUM in respect of the miner's picketing duties (see Chapter Four).[63]

As the strike drew to a close the Cabinet went further and classified 'strikers applying for social security benefit to which they were not properly entitled', as a form of intimidation.[64] This was a further extension of the use of 'intimidation' and seems an odd use of the term, though shortly after the strike this tone was developed when Cabinet again discussed supplementary benefit for strikers and the need for a review of industrial policy. This was to include: 'Action against industrial indiscipline – in the sense of measures… designed to alter the balance of industrial power by providing additional restraints on industrial lawlessness' including a 'review of Social Security benefits payable to strikers and their families'.[65] This theme was further developed a month later when Heath sent an internal minute to Carr, which suggested that the Government 'may need to be ready at short notice with specific proposals for further safeguards against the misuse of trade union power.' This would include 'our thinking on the scope for reforming the law on picketing and on the scope for curtailing the payment of supplementary benefit to strikers' families (possibly at the same time making the payment of strike pay by unions compulsory).'[66] The DTI circulated a memo at the end of February concerning the law on picketing, which discussed the issue of supplementary benefit to those on strike. It noted that if a striker were in receipt of strike pay from the union then 'this would be offset against the family benefit requirement, as would any current refund of PAYE.' It noted also that the NUM were careful to avoid either form of payment from reducing the benefit receivable by around one hundred and eighty thousand striking miners. It concluded that the NUM's ability to free strike funds from use for strike pay enabled it to pay subsistence allowances to pickets at levels which did not affect family benefits.[67] It seems that the Government intended to make it more difficult for both striking miners in this instance, and strikers in general, and also the union concerned to challenge its policy of wage restraint.

[63] TNA: CAB128/50/3, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 2, 18 January; LAB77/84, DHSS note, 'Payment of Supplementary Benefit to Pickets', 19 January 1972
[64] TNA: CAB128/50/7, Cabinet Conclusions, Item 3, 10 February 1972
[65] TNA: HO325/103, Letter, Trend to Angel, 10 April 1972
[66] TNA: HO325/103, Minute, Heath to Carr, 20 April 1972
[67] TNA: POWE14/2664, Minute, Oliver to Taylor, 29 February 1972

## 10.8 Miners' Success

The Home Office noted three areas where the police had found difficulties during the strike: mass picketing (or 'intimidation by numbers'), as at Saltley, due to the participation of overwhelming numbers of non-pickets who could not be cleared from the scene without risk of serious danger to life; the extension of picketing to establishments not directly concerned in the dispute, which made it difficult for the police to concentrate their resources efficiently; and (where the police were most helpless) the doctrine of the 'sanctity about the picket line', with the strike demonstrating that this 'myth' is now being taken even further and that trade union instructions not to move goods 'can be just as effective in stopping the economy as picket lines.'[68] The DTI post-mortem concurred, arguing that a key reason for the miners' success was 'other unions respecting picket lines rather than the violence and intimidation which undoubtedly did occur at some places.'[69] At the end of the strike *The Times* wrote on the legal basis of picketing and reasoned that the NUM's behaviour was scrupulously constitutional and that the placing of pickets was within the law. It pondered whether it would be desirable in the future to confine lawful picketing to the strikers' place of work, but argued that the miners' success arose not from individual acts of violence, nor from mass pickets, but rather 'essentially because members of trade unions in general respected their presence.'[70] The DTI circulated a minute concerning the law on picketing, which referred to *The Times* article and summarised its outlook as, that no change in the law 'would affect the sympathetic reaction of other unions to appeals, especially from miners, not to cross legal, peaceful picket lines.' It noted that the precise guidance given to other unions by the TUC and by NUM was unclear, but that TGWU leader Jones had made an 'adroit evasion of legal liability' by expressing merely general support for the NUM whilst leaving local action up to individual members, and not even local branches.[71] This refers to Jones' speech in early February when he railed against the thousands of non-union lorry drivers who were crossing picket lines, and in support of members of the TGWU who were backing the miners. The DTI report at the time had made the point that:

[68] TNA: HO325/103, Paper, Waddell to Davies, 3 March 1972
[69] TNA: FV 38/184, DTI Post-mortem, June 1972
[70] *The Times*, 26 February 1972
[71] TNA: POWE14/2664, Minute, Oliver to Taylor, 29 February 1972

> By making it clear that sympathetic action is a matter for individual TGWU members and avoiding from the start any central guidance, he has effectively fragmented the target for any legal action under the Trade Disputes Act 1967 (or after 28 February the Industrial Relations Act 1971), making it necessary to pursue any action against the individual members rather than union leadership.[72]

The DTI minute also noted that ASLEF had sought a different means to avoid prosecution in its support for the miners, and that it may have encouraged NUM pickets to 'have been brought in to legalise the union's own decision to black oil freight.' The actions of the TGWU and ASLEF point to the uncertainty that unions and in particular union leaders felt about the changes to the legal position of picketing under the I.R.Act, which was soon to become law.

### 10.9 Industrial Relations Legislation

Concerned about growing militancy in industrial relations and 'unofficial' strike action, both Labour and Conservative governments had sought to introduce legislation in the period before the strike to strengthen the hand of the official union leaderships in order that they might contain the unofficial element. The first Wilson Government appointed a Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations in 1965 chaired by Lord Donovan, which took soundings from trade unions, academics and industry, and issued its report ('Donovan') in 1968.[73] This highlighted three key features of British industrial relations: recorded strikes (other than mining) had trebled from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s; almost all of these were 'unofficial'- (lacking union leadership approval); and they were invariably unconstitutional - (in breach of procedure). Donovan resisted statutory measures and noted that the transformation of industrial relations in the 1960s and had led to a huge increase in shop stewards, who were not generally seen as 'troublemakers', but as 'more of a lubricant than an irritant'. It recommended that they be further integrated into the trade union machinery, and for the union to police the rank-and-file more effectively.[74] The

[72] TNA: PREM15/985, PRCS/22, 5-6 February 1972

[73] *The Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*, Cmnd 3623, (HMSO, 1968), (hereafter *Donovan*)

[74] Donovan, paras 70-1 & 110; Fox, A., *History & Heritage; the social origins of the British industrial relations system*, (London, 1985) p.397; Sewell, R., *In the Cause of Labour: History of British Trade Unionism*, (London, 2003) pp.278-9

Conservative opposition's response to Donovan, *Fair Deal at Work*,[75] pre-empted the report by publishing a month earlier but shared many of its concerns especially the curbing of unofficial strikes. Following criticism of Donovan by both industry and the Conservatives, Labour's own response, *In Place of Strife*,[76] accepted much of Donovan whilst arguing that statutory measures were required. Minkin argues that the trade unions saw *In Place of Strife* as an attack on their rights, and a contravention of the 'rules' of the relationship between the Labour Party and the unions in that it traversed the boundary between 'political' and 'industrial' matters. Opposition to the White Paper grew within the trade unions, though Panitch argues that the main challenge came from 'the more militant sections of the rank-and-file rather than the union leadership'. The parliamentary Labour Party was concerned about the damage the proposals might cause to the labour movement, not least the unions' ability to control the working class, with several cabinet ministers, including Home Secretary Jim Callaghan, voicing concern.[77]

Building upon *Fair Deal at Work*, the Conservatives 1970 election manifesto proposed industrial relations legislation as a solution to the trade union problem.[78] The Conservatives had spent time in opposition rethinking their attitude towards the trade unions and met at the Selsdon Park Hotel in January 1970 to tie up the loose ends of their policies, where Carr stated: 'We need someone in a major sector to take a strike and not wilt', at which Heath warned: 'Better not to talk about it. Even Cabinets don't.'[79] In November 1970, during a strategy meeting at Chequers, Chancellor of the Exchequer Anthony Barber argued that: 'the Government must stand up to a strike, perhaps to more than one strike, in the public sector and be seen to be allowing the consequence of management to work

[75] *Fair Deal at Work: The Conservative Approach to Modern Industrial Relations*, Conservative Political Centre, (London, 1968)
[76] *In Place of Strife: A Policy for Industrial Relations*, Cmnd 3888, (HMSO, 1969)
[77] Minkin, L., *The Contentious Alliance. Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, (Edinburgh, 1992) pp.114–16; Panitch, L., *Social Democracy and Labour Militancy*, (Cambridge, 1976) p.179, cited in Thorpe, A., 'The Labour Party and the Trade Unions' in McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. & Campbell, A., (Eds.), *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-79*, (Monmouth, 2007) p.139; Dorfman, G., *Government versus Trade Unionism in British Politics since 1968*, (London, 1979) p.25
[78] Conservative Party Manifesto, *A Better Tomorrow*, 1970
[79] Moran, M., *The politics of industrial relations; the life and death of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act*, (London, 1977) p.3; Taylor, R., 'The Heath government and industrial relations: myth and reality' in Ball, S. & Selsdon, A., *The Heath Government, 1970-1974: A Reappraisal*, (Harlow, 1996) pp.168-9

through to bankruptcy in one or two striking cases.'[80] Despite a desire to stand up to the public sector, Holmes believes that the Conservatives genuinely wished to strengthen the trade union leadership in relation to the power of the shop stewards that had emerged in the 1960s,[81] and Heath saw the trade unions as potential allies for his modernisation agenda.

The premise of the Industrial Relations Act,[82] introduced by the Heath Government, was that British industrial relations suffered from union leaders' political motivation and that there would be fewer strikes if ordinary members were in control. It was consequently infused with the promotion of individualism as a means to counter the power of united action.[83] Ultimately it had contradictory aims in that it sought to extend the control individuals exercised over the union, but also to increase the responsibility and control that union officers had over the unruly (unofficial) elements of the membership.[84] This reflected differing and transitional views within the Conservative Party: for example, Carr saw a real need 'to strengthen the authority of the democratically elected trade union leadership',[85] while Heath insisted, that the authority of properly elected and appointed trade union officials should be strengthened, if only to make it easier for them to cope with the unofficial element.[86] Timothy Raison (Conservative Political Centre), however, argued against working with the unions and for an assault on One Nation Toryism and its obsession with stability. This entailed a 'firmer but not unfair' approach to the unions, involving the law. Ideally changes would be negotiated with them, 'but if agreement's impossible they must be achieved without it. Again this may arouse accusations of class warfare, but that cannot be helped – the sores of our economy must not be left to fester indefinitely, even if it hurts to cure them.'[87]

[80] TNA:CAB164/1158, Meeting Notes, Chequers, 'Strategy for Dealing with Inflation', 14 November 1970
[81] Holmes, M., *The Failure of the Heath Government*, (Basingstoke, 1997) p.19
[82] Industrial Relations Act 1971, c72
[83] Weekes, B., *Industrial relations and the limits of law: The industrial effects of the Industrial Relations Act, 1971,* (Oxford, 1975) p.221; King, J.E., 'Penal Clauses in Labour Relations Legislation: The Case of the British Industrial Relations Act, 1971-74', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.18, No.2, 1976, pp.144-5
[84] Weekes, *Industrial relations and the limits of law*, p.64
[85] *The Times*, 12 August 1970
[86] Ziegler, P., *Edward Heath: The Authorised Biography*, (London, 2011) p.212
[87] Raison, T., *Conflict and Conservatism*, (Conservative Political Centre, Pamphlet no.313), March 1965, cited in Taylor, A., 'The Conservative Party and the Trade Unions', in McIlroy et al, *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism*, p.155

The TUC was opposed to legislating on industrial relations, fearing the undermining of its authority or the outlawing of activities essential to the pursuit of legitimate trade union aims. It was upset at the Government's refusal to negotiate on the legislation and the short time scale given to complete the process, and Carr later conceded that he was unwise to have refused to compromise.[88] He believed that the unions would oppose the plans 'until they became law', as union leaders had advised him they would, and so there seemed little point in extending the consultation phase.[89] The hurried nature of the legislation's introduction, and its non-negotiability, encouraged the view that the Government sought a confrontation with the labour movement. During the debates Labour MP Eric Heffer called it 'class legislation',[90] which, whilst arguably true, ignored the fact that it was very similar to *In Place of Strife*. Wilson described the Bill as 'a "Trots" charter, because it is the militants who will be encouraged'.[91] Castle vowed to fight tooth and nail to destroy the Bill, and at the Labour Party conference in 1971 a resolution calling for the Act to be 'completely repealed in the first session of a new Labour government' was passed. These manoeuvres were essentially aimed at allowing Labour to mend fences with the trade union movement, broken by *In Place of Strife*, and was also a delay tactic allowing Labour to appear radical, whilst relieving them of the need to do anything significant at the time.[92] The TUC launched a public campaign against the Bill with a petition, the production of millions of leaflets, national, regional and local meetings and demonstrations, including one at Hyde Park. It rejected proposals for strikes, but one-day protests organised by the Broad Left's Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) took place involving, three hundred and fifty thousand people on 8 December 1970, and around one and a quarter million each on 1 and 18 March 1971. The CP, through the LCDTU, had motivated significant stoppages, though it remained careful to emphasise that it was seeking to move the official movement not to transcend it. Approximately

[88] Dorfman, *Government versus Trade Unionism*, p.53; Wigham, E., *Strikes and the Government 1893-1974*, (London, 1976) p.158; Carr, *Granada TV*, 26 May 1976, cited in Holmes, *The Failure*, p.20

[89] Ramsden, J., *The Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957-1975*, (A History of the Conservative Party), (London, 1996) p.331

[90] HC Deb, vol.807 c.731

[91] Taylor, 'The Heath Government and Industrial relations', pp.161-4; Phillips, 'Industrial Relations', p.225; Moran, *The politics of industrial relations*, p.99; Darlington, R., & Lyddon, D., *Glorious Summer: Class struggle in Britain 1972*, (London, 2001) p.20

[92] HC Debs, vol.807 cc.665-6; vol.808 cc,1227-8; Labour Party, *Annual Reports*, 1971, p.168, & 1972, p.133; Thorpe, 'The Labour Party and the Trade Unions', p.141; Moran, *The politics of industrial relations*, p.99

one third of TUC members participated directly in such protests but these failed to halt the legislation, though Moran argues that this was not actually the point of the campaign, which, rather, 'kept the rank and file occupied' and crucially rebuffed those calling for strike action.[93]

### 10.10 Potential for Prosecution

When the 1972 strike began, the law on picketing was contained in the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 (section 7), and the Trade Disputes Act 1906 (section 2). The former made it an offence to compel a person to abstain from working through violence or intimidation, through persistent following, through watching or besetting his house, or place of work, or through following them with two or more persons in a disorderly manner. The latter stated that it was lawful for one or more persons to attend at or near house or place of work, if merely for the purpose of peacefully communicating or persuading such person to abstain from working. The I.R.Act repealed portions of the 1906 Act, whilst its section 134 continued the general protection of peaceful picketing, but removed protection of such activity from a person's home, as distinct from their place of work.[94] The Act was not due to come fully into effect until the end of February 1972, though its emergency provisions were available during the miners' strike. The Cabinet were frustrated that they would be unable to curb legal picketing during the strike, but were wary about the implications of using the newly minted legislation for the first time in such a high-profile case for fear of discrediting the Act as a whole.[95]

The circular sent by the Home Office to the Chief Constables at the beginning of the strike requesting notice of disorder was not issued with a view to keeping the peace, nor intended to demonstrate that picketing was peaceful, but rather in the hope that it would show that the picketing was illegal or violent and that this might lead to bad press or, ideally, prosecution. The police, whose primary

[93] Wigham, *Strikes and the Government,* p.158; Moran, *The politics of industrial relations,* pp.111-6; Allen, V. L., *The Militancy of British Miners,* (Shipley, 1981) p.171; Dorfman, *Government versus Trade Unionism,* p.55; Darlington & Lyddon, *Glorious Summer,* pp.71-2; McIlroy, J., 'Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Politics', in McIlroy et al, *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism,* p.244

[94] HO325/99, E(72)1, Note on Picketing, Chairman, OC Emergencies, 14 January; Note, Hilary to Evans, 25 January 1972

[95] TNA: CAB134/3374, E(71)25, MC Emergencies, 22 December 1971

concern is in keeping the peace, were not necessarily aware of the Government's motives, and Teesside Constabulary responded each week with a general assessment of 'no cause for concern', which ironically was a cause for concern for the Cabinet.[96] The Government were frustrated that peaceful picketing, even of power stations, was lawful, and were uncertain whether the relevant provisions of the Act would significantly change the situation in any case.[97] At the end of the third week, the Board received an opinion on picketing from its regional legal department in Doncaster, which noted that whilst peaceful picketing for the purposes of persuading others to abstain from work was legal, there were a wide variety of possible offences within each situation, e.g. for assault, that may lead to a prosecution.[98] A circular sent to NCB Board members subsequently noted that given the lack of cooperation from the NUM leadership the Board must consider what opportunities might be available for legal action against the pickets. It set out areas where picketing might breach criminal law, for example; excessive numbers, intimidation, obstructing the highway, obstructing the police, or violence.[99]

In practice, all of the arrests made during the miners' strike (two hundred and sixty-four in England and Wales and twenty-seven in Scotland) were made under the general law - obstruction of the highway, obstruction of the police, assault, insulting behaviour - rather than under industrial relations law.[100] The Cabinet also pursued a possible prosecution, and the Solicitor General requested that the DTI inform him of any incidents at picketed power stations and industries outside of the coal industry so that a plaintiff and defendant might be found for a possible case. The DTI noted that the CEGB and oil companies were rather concerned about repercussions against their own staffs if any such action were brought.[101] The Home Office subsequently informed the CEGB that they should contact their local Chief Constable as soon as possible if and when they had been 'picketed by more than what are considered peaceful (and therefore legal) pickets'.[102] The CEGB replied that whilst appreciating the intent behind the letter it appeared to be founded on a mis-reading of the situation. The problem, it noted, was not

[96] TNA: HO325/101, Telexes, Teesside, 17, 23, & 31 January, & 13 February 1972
[97] TNA: CAB134/3485, E(72), MC Emergencies, 2nd Meeting, 26 January 1972
[98] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Glover to Brass, 28 January 1972
[99] TNA: COAL31/300, Letter, Jeffries to Board members and regional directors, 31 January 1972
[100] TNA: HO325/103, Paper, Waddell to Davies, 3 March 1972
[101] TNA: POWE2661, Note, Oliver to DTI list, 31 January 1972
[102] TNA: POWE2661, Letter, Thomas to CEGB, 4 February 1972

whether the picketing was peaceful, but rather that the pickets were obstructing the highway leading to the power stations and so preventing delivery of essential goods and this situation was becoming urgent.[103]

### 10.11 A Change in the Law

Following the introduction of a State of Emergency towards the end of the strike, Alan Campbell, barrister and Queens Counsellor, claimed that everyone was asking 'What is wrong with the Law?' He subsequently provided a legal opinion entitled 'Misapprehensions on Picketing' in which he argued that there was nothing much wrong with the Law. The NCB did not invoke the law, he claimed, because it wrongly considered itself to have been a Government pawn, and others who may have contemplated legal action were discouraged by views expressed incorrectly in the House that much of the picketing was legal. The law on picketing is complicated, he noted, and peaceful picketing during a trade or industrial dispute is legal but even in that circumstance action in breach of a commercial contract, or intimidation or violence or similar, renders the picketing unlawful. He reasoned that a statement to this effect in the House would have had a considerable stabilising effect. His conclusions included that: whilst the I.R.Act had 'Emergency Procedures' it was desirable to curtail industrial strife before it became an emergency; and that it was most desirable to change the law such that the procurement of a breach of contract is constituted both by 'direct' persuasion, which is unlawful in itself, and also by 'indirect' methods such as picketing.[104] In other words it would be most desirable to criminalise elements of picketing. Following Campbell's paper, Heath requested that urgent consideration should be given to changes in the law on picketing.[105]

The Ministerial Committee on the Coalminers' Pay Dispute had discussed the scale and manner of the picketing a week earlier and argued 'that the bounds of the law had so clearly been exceeded as to bring the law into disrepute and the capacity to enforce it into question.' It believed that the uncertainty on the law made it impractical for the police to enforce it more effectively, and that it was

[103] TNA: POWE2661, Letter, Brown to Davies, 4 February 1972
[104] TNA: HO325/103, Memo, Campbell, 'Misapprehensions on Picketing', 20 February 1972
[105] TNA: HO325/103, Minute, Armstrong to Holland, 21 February 1972

therefore important to devise much tighter law for the future with regard to places, numbers, and authorised personnel legally permitted to be picketed.[106] The police had in fact earlier made a similar point, following problems with a strike at Pilkington's glassworks at St. Helens in 1970, when its north west regional police conference had urged both a review of the law related to picketing and that police chiefs should be given guidance on which to base instructions to police forces around the country. The Home Office view at that time was that the existing legislation was adequate, and that 'it could be embarrassing if it became known that police were seeking additional statutory powers.'[107] Following Heath's later request, a number of proposals for changing the law on picketing were suggested, though it was noted that most had been considered and rejected during the passage of the I.R.Bill. Home Office officials did not consider that any amendment to the criminal law was the right way forward, and they advised that police powers seemed to be adequate as they were but that it should be made clear, unambiguously and publicly, that the police had the right to limit picket numbers to those necessary for peaceful persuasion only.[108]

## 10.12 Conclusion

Relations between pickets and police was shown to have been largely peaceful and good natured for the majority of the strike, in which the police balanced their obligations to allow both the right to picket and the right to work. The police received criticism from the Government and the NCB for not being forceful enough in preventing picketing deemed illegal, and for seeming unwilling to prosecute such illegality. Changes to policing in the previous period had led to larger forces under the control of Chief Constables and greater control from the Home Office, and had also paved the way for the use of mutual aid between police forces. These changes were seen to have been brought to bear in the policing at Saltley, in which an enhanced form of policing was in evidence, including the use of mutual aid, provocation and snatch squads. The mass picketing at Saltley was instrumental in the Heath Government denouncing the strike as a 'victory for

[106] TNA: CAB130/553, GEN78(72), MC Coalminers' Pay Dispute, 4th Meeting, 15 February 1972
[107] TNA: HO 325/99, Meeting of No.1 (North West) Region Police Conference, 14 December 1971
[108] TNA: HO325/103, Letter, Edwards to Wright, incl. Paper, 'The Law on Picketing', 25 February; 'Picketing and Secondary Industrial Action', Note by Officials, 18 May 1972

violence', but police reports showed that there were in fact few incidents of disorder in the picketing of coal stocks or power stations, which were those that were instrumental in winning the strike. The hostility that was shown towards clerical staff and officials who crossed picket lines can be said to have been intimidating. However, the Government increasingly classified mass picketing as 'intimidation', even where the behaviour was peaceful. The use of the term intimidation changed during the strike, and was criticised for being used essentially as a means to denounce and de-legitimise effective picketing. The term also came to include the action of those who sought welfare benefits to which they were not entitled, and was part of a wider clampdown on the provision of benefits to those on strike, as a means to apply financial pressure on pickets. Government records showed that the miners' victory was not the result of violence but was essentially because other trade unionists respected the miners' picket lines.

Union leaders were seen to have been wary of recent changes to the law on picketing and keen to avoid prosecution, and therefore encouraged individual trade unionists to take action rather than endorsing general union support for the miners. The Government and the NCB both sought grounds to prosecute pickets in the strike and were frustrated that most of the picketing was legal. The frustration at the effectiveness of the picketing, and the debacle of the confrontation at Saltley fed into conservative thinking with regard to the need to change and strengthen the law on picketing. This thinking had transformed from an earlier desire to strengthen the hand of the official leadership as a means of controlling the militant element, towards undermining the power of trade unions *per se*, despite the union leadership's consistent attempts to control, or police, the behaviour of the pickets, which was widely acknowledged. The term 'a victory for violence' was therefore used by the Heath Government both to explain away its failure to beat the miners, but also, and perhaps essentially, to justify the *need* to do something about industrial relations, and was informed by a growing belief in the subversive nature of picketing. This betrays a politicisation of industrial relations, in that the Governmnet was not prepared to tolerate any challenge to its rule, particularly from the public sector. In this it declared a desire to alter the balance of industrial power in favour of the Government, whilst seeking to criminalise picketing.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to investigate the conduct of the 1972 miners' strike. It has shown that the decline in demand for coal in the mid-1950s led to a contraction of the industry and gave impetus to increased mechanisation that required further investment funded via Government loans. Though productivity rose due to the larger proportion of mechanised production, the Board's loan repayments were drawn from a decreasing pool of collieries and men, and arguably impacted on its ability to pay higher wages. The Government (as ultimate employer) preferred to keep wages low in order to keep the price of coal at competitive levels for the benefit of industry in general. The NUM leadership effectively aided this process by arguing that higher wages would lead to a further contraction of the industry and that it was better to maintain a lower wage in order to keep more jobs, a position that also suited the Union, which had an interest in maintaining a larger membership. Conversely, the miners' interests were in achieving job security and a reasonable living wage, though not necessarily in the coal industry. We saw that the NUM's role in maintaining a compliant workforce, during the period of significant contraction in the decade before the strike, was very effective. It was able to achieve this; by appealing to the miners to defend the nationalised industry, in calls to do nothing that would hinder the return of a Labour Government, in subsequent appeals for adherence to the 'new realism' of the Wilson Government's modernisation agenda, and in encouraging miners to work harder to save their pits from closure (as a means to head off any developing protest). The thesis has shown that Wilson's relegation of coal in favour of other fuels, and the introduction of the Advanced Closure Programme, led to growing discontent amongst miners and anger towards both the Labour Government and the NUM leadership, which supported its position. This made the Union's ability

to contain the militancy of the workforce increasingly untenable as the NUM were shown to be more allied to the interests of the industry, and therefore the Board, than they were to those of the miners.

The coal industry historically had been beset by numerous small-scale strikes over conditions and wages, which played out at pit-level. The thesis demonstrated that the introduction of the 1955 day-wage system, and in particular the NPLA a decade later, had a transformative effect in both increasing the discontent felt by many miners and in transferring this discontent from a local stage on to the national arena as local wage bargaining diminished to be replaced by national wage-bargaining. The NPLA also caused the wages of many relatively higher paid miners to stagnate due to their wages increasing more slowly to allow the lower paid Areas to catch up as moves were made towards wage parity. Areas with higher wages were those primarily in the central coalfield that were the most productive, in part due to wider seams, and had therefore been less affected by previous pit closures. Thus, the parity aims of the NPLA had the effect of bringing discontent into Areas, notably Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, where it had not previously manifested, whilst the national wage-bargaining effectively closed local means of expressing this discontent, and thus bottling it up where it might previously have had an outlet. The combined effects of the ACP and the NPLA led to miners' frustration and anger spilling on to the national stage in unofficial strikes in both 1969 and 1970, which had the effect of preparing the miners for the following year's dispute.

The 1971 NUM conference decision to seek a large percentage pay rise was a product of this discontent, and was an attempt to redress the imbalance in miners' wages relative to comparable industrial and public-sector workers. In making the claim, the NUM members were effectively in defiance of the position of the leadership believing that its advice had worn thin since the industry had contracted in spite of their restraint, and that their wages had been held back in vain. They consequently decided that a stand must be taken to restore wage levels, even if this entailed a further contraction. The higher claim was sanctioned by the leadership primarily as a means of containing the growing militancy within the membership, and was based on the temporary illusion of better prospects for the industry suggested by the Board's accounts. The thesis has demonstrated that the NUM conference decision to decrease the size of the majority required to call an

official strike had emerged from an initial proposal for a simple majority put forward by the more militant Areas and a subsequent counter-proposal, backed by the leadership, which lowered the threshold but by a lesser amount and thus made an official strike a little less likely. The subsequent ballot cleared the new threshold with a margin of victory that was widely regarded as small, and this was taken by the Government to mean that the miners would not be united in the conduct of the strike. This gave it a misplaced confidence and informed its subsequent strategy, in which it believed it had the upper hand.

The overtime ban, which began the dispute, prepared the miners for the subsequent strike by running down coal stocks, forging a unity over the wage claim, and creating an organisational structure of liaison committees to deal with issues that arose between the unions within the collieries. These proved very effective and transformed seamlessly into strike committees, and whilst they had been encouraged by the national leadership, they made decisions and controlled the picketing at a local level, which increasingly reflected a disconnect between the national leadership's directives and the local branches implementation. There was shown to be significant local variation in the approach and attitude of the liaison committees, particularly over the issue of safety and maintenance work. This initially exacerbated the division between miners and officials during the overtime ban, which then grew into open hostility in the subsequent strike.

The Heath Government introduced the N-1 Norm as a means to control public sector wage inflation, whilst proclaiming a desire to take on the public sector and contain strike activity. In this strike it faced an industry and workforce that was arguably ready for such a confrontation, which subsequently showed the Government to have been ill-prepared and over-confident. Miners' wages were relatively low in comparison to other public sector and manual workers, and their wage claim was a sincere attempt to redress this imbalance. The thesis showed that British inflation levels and wage settlements were comparable to those of other leading economies, despite suggestions that militant union leaders were the cause of Britain's problems. It demonstrated that the Government's self-imposed limit on public sector wage settlements was inconsistently applied and took no account of the merits of the miners' case. The Cabinet were aware that their imposition of the pay norm would provoke a strike, and they not only ignored this danger but actively sought such an outcome. This betrayed a strategic desire to

take on and beat one union, particularly one as significant as the NUM, in order to make other unions think twice about standing up and challenging Government policy; echoes of this strategy would ultimately resonate in the 1984-85 miners' strike

The Heath Government's professed desire to remain detached from the negotiations was shown to be merely a public relations exercise since it actually dictated the terms and the time-frame within which the NCB could negotiate. The withdrawal of the NCB's final offer was demonstrated to have been imposed on the Board by the Government, and exacerbated the situation by hardening the resolve of the miners. The issue of arbitration was another in which the Government's public pronouncements were at odds with its actions, and it was used in an attempt to swing public opinion against the miners until the deteriorating situation forced the Cabinet to establish the Wilberforce Inquiry in order to settle the dispute. The thesis exposed the private and secret negotiations undertaken by the leaders of both the NUM and the TUC in seeking to resolve the dispute on terms less favourable to the miners, and without their knowledge. This demonstrates that the real role of trade union leaders is not as defenders of their members but as a liaison between the employer and the workers for the benefit of the industry.

The thesis showed that the picketing during the strike was not primarily the mass and militant picketing that is often portrayed, and that the majority of the picketing against coal movement was largely small scale and incident free. The picketing of the collieries, power stations and depots was shown to have involved negotiations or discussions between pickets and other workers and that whilst this was not always successful it mostly did not result in aggression. This picketing began with small picket lines and subsequently diverged between small *token* pickets on the one hand and larger scale more *interventionist* picketing on the other, with the use of larger scale and mass picketing developing in part where small-scale picketing was found to be ineffectual. The thesis demonstrated that the pickets' appeals to non-unionised drivers, whose wages depended on a delivery or collection, or to dock workers paid on piece work, were often found to fall on deaf ears. Consequently, the miners found the need to increase the size of the pickets in order, in effect, to block the site entrance in situations where their appeals were not being accepted. The miners' victory was shown to have

been achieved largely through the blockading of power stations, which, for the Government, was unexpected and unforeseen. The NCB initially felt well prepared to withstand the strike but faced a problem of coal movement being curtailed by pickets leading to a rapid deterioration in the stock position and the consequent need for power cuts as some power stations ran short of fuel or supplies. The thesis demonstrated that the supply of coal to priority consumers remained a key issue throughout the dispute and played a significant role in the manipulation of public opinion. It also served to highlight the differing views of what should be considered a priority with most miners considering that schools should also be included.

The widespread disregard shown by the pickets for the NUM's national directives on maintenance and safety cover reflected a deep anger and frustration against the leadership's implication in the processes of pit closures and wage restraint, and ultimately differing views on the future of the industry. The decision to withhold safety cover was in part a negotiating tactic, but the anger directed towards those who worked during the strike was aimed primarily at their role as strike-breakers. This is underlined by the picketing of clerical workers that had no real negotiating element, and the picketing against maintenance work being primarily focused on NACODS deputies rather than BACM managers implying a sense of betrayal by those within the miners' own community or class. The miners' lack of concern for the state of the pits also appears to reflect a realistic view of an industry in decline. The thesis has shown that there were a variety of approaches to the picketing of officials and clerical workers, both within and between Areas, which points to decision making taking place at the localities. The way in which the picketing unfolded in a particular locality was a response to what appeared to work in that locality, and where small scale and peaceful picketing did not appear to work, picketing became more militant or larger scale or both in order to be more effective. The thesis demonstrated that in some localities a militant attitude achieved results early on and this therefore became the form that was used throughout the strike, whereas in others mass picketing when combined with demands to restrict numbers achieved its purpose, and this restriction then continued successfully. In some localities NACODS continued to attempt to cross the picket lines in accordance with national guidelines and the requests of the Board, but in an increasing number NACODS turned back at the first sign of resistance. This presumably reflected variously a preference not to

have to confront the anger of the pickets daily, some sympathy for the miners' cause, and perhaps also an awareness that they would all soon be back at work together. The Board's exasperation at the apparent lack of determination by some officials to pass the picket lines was ultimately an expression of its frustration at the development of the strike.

The miners enjoyed broad support from the trade union movement, which largely came following direct contact between pickets and fellow trade unionists. The TUC showed itself unwilling to actively support the strike and merely restricted itself to assurances that members would not cross picket lines, a central tenet of trade unionism. The widespread support that the miners received from the transport unions was not initiated by the TUC statement, having already begun beforehand. It reflected both support for the miners' cause and conversely hostility towards the Government, which built upon protests against the Industrial Relations Bill a year earlier. The miners received significant and widespread support from students, who identified the miners' struggle as akin to their own dispute with the Government, and were seen to be enthusiastic but less disciplined in their actions than were the miners. Significant support for the miners also came from their wives, who played an active supportive and political role, and stood firmly by the miners in their challenge to the Government. Wide support was also received from members of the public, and whilst this was not universal, public opinion remained on the miners' side throughout the dispute. The thesis has demonstrated that the miners received substantial support from Birmingham engineers at the confrontation at 'Saltley' gasworks that forced the closure of the depot. Whilst this was not instrumental in the miners' victory it was seen to have been a major blow to the Government, which had chosen to make the site a test of strength and drafted police officers from around the country to that end. The Government denounced the strike as a victory for violence, in part based on the events at Saltley, though we have seen that it was essentially not a particularly violent confrontation and the violence such as it existed came from both the pickets and the police, with the latter using enhanced tactics and provocations akin to the development of a more paramilitary style of policing. The support that the miners received from the engineers was shown to have its roots in the ideals of trade union solidarity, and the engineers themselves identified it as a unifying and emotional experience, which was in part due to the Conservative Government being the focus of the revolt.

We have seen that the accusation of 'a victory for violence' was not supported by the evidence and was, rather, a way for the Government both to explain away its failure to beat the miners, and also, and perhaps essentially, to justify the 'need' to do something about industrial relations. The picketing of coal stocks was shown to be largely peaceful, and relations between pickets and police prior to Saltley mostly good. The mass picketing at Saltley in particular, and 1972 miners' strike more generally, fed into Conservative thinking with regard to necessary changes to the policing of strikes and to the law on picketing. In this, the use of mutual aid by the police was seen by the Government to have been useful and necessary and led to its desire to build upon this for future disputes, whilst its desire to strengthen the hand of the official leadership as a means of controlling the militant element, changed towards a desire to undermine the power of trade unions *per se*. This was in part a recognition that the union leadership, despite its best efforts, had been unable to effectively police its own members in this strike. The thesis demonstrated the Heath Government's belief in the subversive nature of picketing betrayed the class nature of its approach in its intolerance for any challenge to its rule, particularly from the public sector. This was underlined by its approach to welfare benefits, which it saw as a means to apply financial pressure to the union and those on strike. In this it openly declared a desire to alter the balance of industrial power in favour of the Government, whilst seeking to criminalise picketing and denouncing as intimidation the actions of those seeking benefits.

This thesis has sought to show that in both the causes and conduct of the strike the miners were in conflict not only with the Board and the Government, but also, and perhaps most significantly, with their own leadership. The initial passivity of the miners was a product of the NUM leadership's machinations over decades, and it was in defiance of this that miners came together to strike. The organisation and control of the strike largely took place at local level, in the decisions made on the picket lines and in the liaison/strike committees. The NUM leadership essentially led the strike from the rear, and was found to have led from the front only in its efforts to contain the militancy of the discontented miners. The thesis has shown that both the right and left wing of the NUM (Labour and CP) played significant roles in supporting the Union leadership to contain this militancy, and to ensure that the membership remained within the sphere of the Labour Party.

The national unity that was unleashed by the NPLA, and manifested in the strikes of 1972 and 1974, proved to be unwelcome to the both the Board and the NUM leadership. They subsequently conspired to undermine this unity via the reintroduction of a productivity element to wages, in the form of the Area Incentive Scheme, which was introduced by the Labour Government in 1977, and played a crucial role in the defeat of the miners in 1985. The 1972 strike paved the way for the 1984-85 strike, but the Government victory in that dispute showed that it had learnt the more significant lessons from the earlier strikes, was determined not to be beaten again, and was consequently better prepared than were the miners.

## Chronology

**1971**

| | |
|---|---|
| **July** | |
| 5 | NUM Annual Conference, Aberdeen |
| **August** | |
| 6 | Industrial Relations Act passed |
| **September** | |
| 14 | NUM wage claim put to Joint National Negotiating Committee |
| **October** | |
| 14 | NEC rejected NCB offer of 7% |
| 21 | NUM national delegate conference decided on overtime ban |
| **November** | |
| 1 | Overtime ban began |
| 5 | NACODS instructed not to join the liaison committees |
| 22-24 | Ballot on strike action |
| **December** | |
| 2 | Ballot resulted in 58.8% majority in favour of strike action |
| 9 | NUM gave notice of strike action for 9 January |
| 21 | NUM rejected final NCB offer |
| 30 | NUM issued instructions concerning safety cover |

**1972**

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| **January** | |
| 3 | Gormley and Ezra met at coal industry function |
| 4 | Ezra met Gormley and Daly |
| | Carr and Davies discussed withholding arbitration |
| 5 | NCB issued revised offer. NEC rejects by 23 votes to 2 |
| 6 | NUM met TUC to request support in the strike |
| | NUR instructed members not to transport oil to power stations |
| 7 | NCB withdrew all previous offers |
| 9 | Week One: Strike began |
| | CEGB estimated 8 weeks of stocks at power stations |
| 10 | TUC made statement on respecting picket lines |

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| 11 & 12 | Daly issued instructions to pickets |
| 12 | NEC decided to picket power stations |
| 14 | NACODS representatives met with NCB to discuss wages |
| | Final pay packets issued to striking miners |
| | Electricity supply unions agreed overtime ban from 1 February |
| 16 | Week Two |
| 17 | COSA members officially joined strike |
| | Barnsley pickets established picketing base in East Anglia |
| | Kent miners began picketing of London power stations |
| 18 | House of Commons debate on coal strike |
| 19 | NUM and NCB met with Feather, who reported back to Carr |
| | Unofficial combine of power workers met in London |
| 19-21 | Mass picket at NCB offices in Doncaster |
| 20 | Unemployment rose above 1 million |
| | Schools began to close due to lack of coal |
| | LSE & Essex students joined pickets at docks |
| 21 | Carr met separately with NCB and NUM |
| | Daly issued statement on picketing and priority supplies |
| 23 | Week Three |
| 24 | Some London power workers began unofficial overtime ban |
| | 1,000 Barnsley pickets in East Anglia |
| | Mass picket at NCB offices, Tondu |
| 26 | Unofficial one day dockers' strike |
| | 24-hour stoppage in Liverpool in support of miners |
| 29 | CEGB 'effective' stocks down to 4 weeks, due to blocked stocks |
| 29-30 | National Union of Students Extraordinary Conference |
| 30 | Week Four |
| | 'Bloody Sunday', 13 people killed in (London)Derry |
| | Weather turned colder, coal demand rose |
| 31 | House of Lords debate on coal strike |
| | Mass picket at NCB offices, Ystrad Hengoed |
| | Students asked to discontinue help for pickets |
| **February** | |
| 2 | 50,000 people demonstrated 'Bloody Sunday' shootings |
| 3 | Fred Matthews killed on picket line at Keadby power station |
| 4 | Picketing began at Nechells gasworks (Saltley) depot |
| 5 | Pickets at Saltley depot called for reinforcements |

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| 6 | Week Five |
| | 20,000 miners demonstrated in London, joined by students |
| 7 | 500 pickets at Saltley depot |
| 8 | 800 pickets at Saltley depot |
| 9 | CEGB stocks down to 2 weeks supply remaining |
| | State of Emergency declared |
| | Carr met with NCB and NUM. Revised offer issued |
| | 10,000 attended Fred Matthews' funeral |
| | Birmingham engineers agreed to back NUM at Saltley |
| | Supplies delivered to Thorpe Marsh power station by helicopter |
| | 400 schools closed in England |
| 10 | State of Emergency in force |
| | Closure of Saltley depot |
| | NUM rejected NCB offer, but reduced its claim |
| | First, unplanned, power cuts |
| 11 | Planned power reductions began |
| | Restrictions imposed on office heating and display lighting |
| | Three-day week imposed |
| | CEGB stocks at 1.5 weeks normal supply |
| | Wilberforce Inquiry appointed |
| 13 | Week Six |
| 14 | Mass picket at Longannet power station, 13 pickets arrested |
| 15 | Wilberforce Inquiry opened |
| | NUM lobby of Parliament |
| | 1,000 schools closed in England and Wales |
| 15-16 | Wilberforce public hearings held |
| 17 | Longannet pickets released following Government intervention |
| 18 | 1.6 million workers laid off to date |
| | Wilberforce findings published |
| | NEC extracted further concessions after meetings with Heath |
| 19 | Official end of picketing |
| 20 | Week Seven |
| 23 | NUM ballot on acceptance of settlement held |
| 28 | Miners returned to work |
| | Industrial Relations Act came fully into force |

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